

Vol 4 No 3 March 1997, Rs 30

INDIA'S QUEST - Fifty years of Independence



THE eye

A WRITTEN
MOVEMENT
N · WORD ·

THE FEMININE DISCOURSE

• Tribute to Paulos Mar Gregorios • Ardhanarishwara
• God is not a Supermale !
• Divinity and Gender • The History of the Women's Movement in India • State Response to the Challenge of Gender • Women and the Uniform Civil Code • Women and the Panchayat • Single Gender Institutions • Sex, Text and Politics • The New Goddess of the Skies • Rabia of Basra • Sarojini Naidu — Selected Letters • Eco-feminism vs Techno-feminism • Oh! Tribal Woman! • The Lonely Saathin • Peoples' Struggles — In Conversation with Ela Bhatt • Mahashweta Devi — An Interview • Chinta — A Short Story • Soaring with the Eagle • Book Reviews • A Human Race • Foundations of Indian Culture by Sri Aurobindo • Panchatantra

At The Threshold?

Her Past, Present & Future

SCULPTURE OF THE ISSUE

Mithuna

The word *mithuna* means a couple who may or may not be involved in an erotic relationship. The *mithuna* motif in sculpture occurs frequently on monuments of ancient and medieval periods. In fact, there is practically no structure without it.

The state of a 'man and woman in close embrace' is a symbol of *moksha*, the final release or the union of two principles, Essence (*purusa*) and Nature (*prakriti*), the unmanifested and manifested. They also symbolise non-duality or re-integration.

The *mithuna* figures in temple art reflect ancient cosmogenic notions such as heaven and earth, light and darkness, *lingam* and *yoni*, etc. In India, ritualised eroticism and mystical union are two aspects of a single phenomenon; it is an attempt to transcend antinomies. Therefore, they are depicted on temple walls. The importance of the *mithuna* stems from the Vedic maxim that a pair (*advandvam*) means strength. These ideas were later expressed iconographically by the figures of Shiva and Parvati and of Vishnu and Lakshmi together or the paired figures of *gandharvas* and *apsaras*.

The *mithuna* motif is also common to Mahayana Buddhist sculpture where it signifies the union of the cosmic Buddha with wisdom (*prajna*), which is personified as female. In Buddhist tantrism this pairing is a subjective inner visualisation; and not merely an outward physical act.

Maithuna means coitus and a *maithuna* couple is therefore a couple in coital position.

Both *mithuna* and *maithuna* are depicted in temple art and secular architecture in various ways. These are of four types:

1. *Lavanyamaya* - a graceful couple; a god and his consort, or a man or woman sitting or standing together in a graceful position without any elements of eroticism.
2. *Asakta* - an amorous couple, embracing or kissing.
3. *Maithunarata* - a couple in the act of sex, generally depicting *bandhas* or the postures from the *Kamasutra* or the *Ratimanjiri*.
4. *Bhrashta* - a couple engaged in abnormal sex.

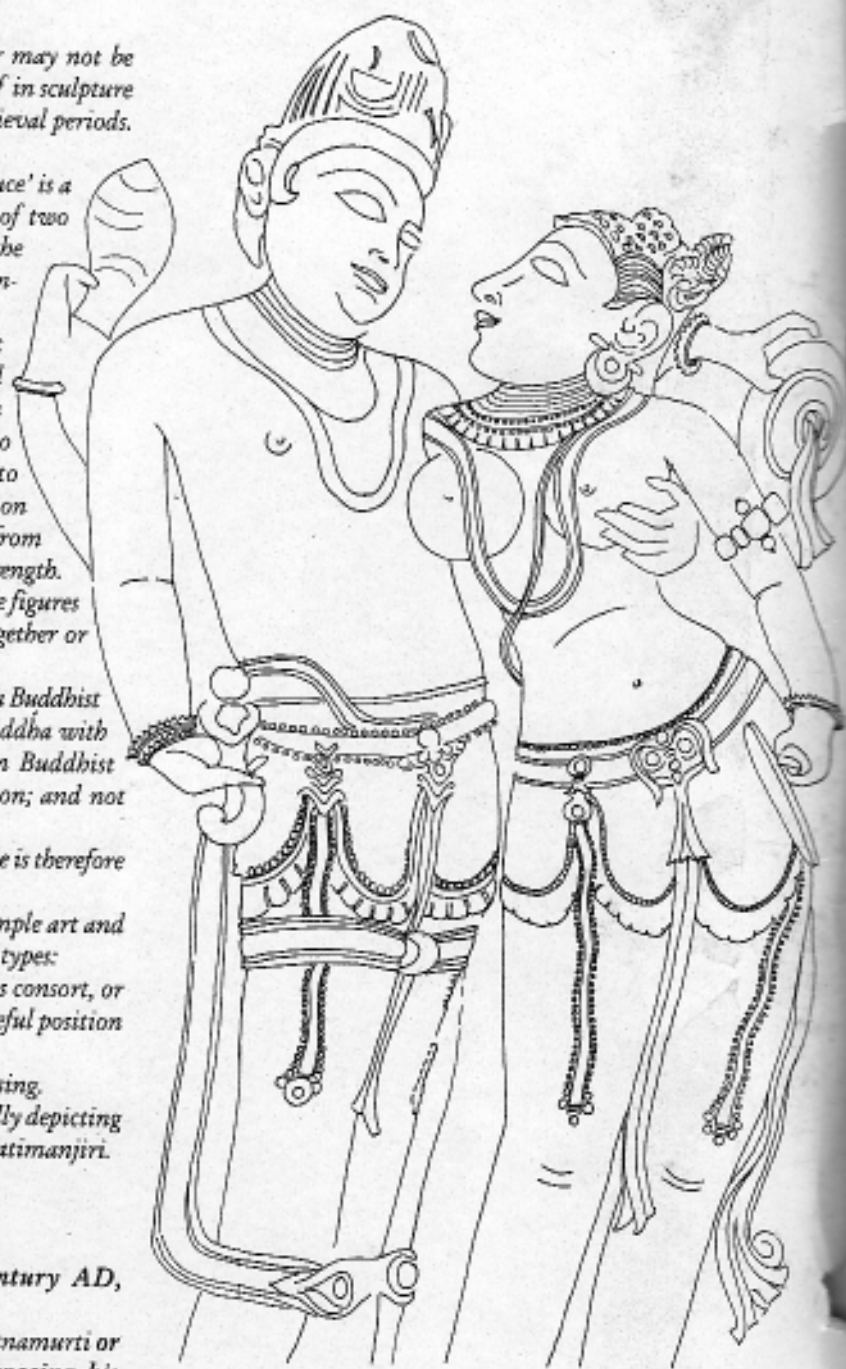
Mithuna - Siva-Shakti, Chandela 11th century AD, Parsvanatha Temple, Khajuraho.

This pose of Shiva and Parvati, known as *alinganamurti* or *alinganachandrasekhara-murti*, depicts Shiva embracing his consort Uma (Parvati). This is one of the loveliest examples of the *lavanyamaya mithuna*.

The four-armed Shiva stands beside his consort and embraces her with his front left hand, while Parvati looks at him lovingly in a fond embrace, holding in her left hand a mirror that symbolizes the illusion of the world of *maya* which she herself symbolises. The cosmic couple melt into each other in this fluid treatment of the metaphysical aspect of tantrism in elegant stone craftsmanship. In duality is unity.

Prabbakar Begde.

Illustrations: Indrani Sen



It seems very appropriate to feature the concept of *mithuna* in our sculpture series, since this issue of THE EYE is on gender. Traditional India's perception of aesthetics constantly reiterates the complementarity of the sexes. There are three other features on the different types of *mithunas* distributed through the issue, thus completing this particular series. The next issue will carry another concept of Indian sculpture.



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A SPIC MACAY
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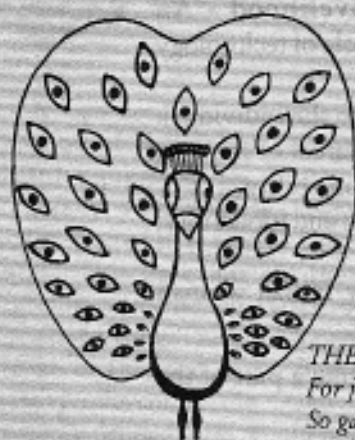
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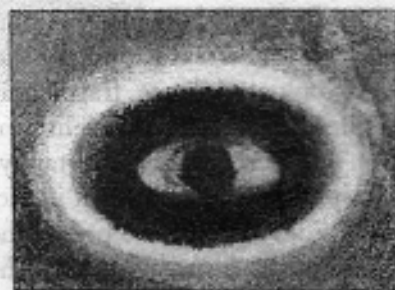
Dr. Tanika Sarkar is a senior lecturer in the department of History in St. Stephen's College, Delhi University. She is the author of *Bengal 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest* (Oxford University Press, Delhi 1987); she has co-edited with Urvashi Butalia, *Women and the Hindu Right* (Kali for Women, Delhi 1995) and has co-authored along with Basu, Datta, Sarkar and Sen, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (Tracts for the Times Series, Orient Longman, Delhi 1993). She has written extensively on peasant and tribal politics within anti-colonial movements, on religion and domesticity in 19th century Bengal and on the contemporary Hindutva movement.

ABOUT OUR FILM MAKER

Vasudha Joshi worked as a reporter and researcher for documentaries at Bandung Productions, London, and as freelance reporter for PTL, New Delhi. In 1988 she set up Vector Productions in partnership with Ranjan Palit to produce documentaries. Their films, *Voices from Baliapal*, *Follow the Rainbow* and others have been critically acclaimed.



THE EYE is your magazine to peruse
For joy, wisdom and edification
So gather your friends
And set new trends
For the ultimate human inspiration.



The Inner Eye is the centre of
perception and enquiry, ever alert
in the pursuit of what is true.

EDITORIAL

Ab! At last I, as a woman, get to write an editorial for an issue on women! This tribe that I belong to has had a long, lonely and chequered history which is still in the making. The tribe memory is full of rebellions, protests, weeping and flailing of arms. It also remembers the quiet determination, dedication and creativity of its elders to find a place in the sun, to stake a claim in the gory politics of gender discrimination. The tribe kinship includes members from all over the world and from all social and economic categories, collectively called 'women'. The time is now ripe for a new kind of member — 'men'. We therefore dedicate this issue of *THE EYE* to the inclusion of the 'male' in the 'feminine discourse'. And if you glanced at the Contents page you would find enough proof that this new membership drive is gaining a certain degree of success.

Let me quote my good friend, Ramachandra Gandhi who spoke about the 'idolatry of victory and chronology'. "Why only fifty years of freedom?" he asks. "Why not celebrate the timeless quality of the Indian spirit?" Unfortunately, the timeless beauty of the Indian feminine spirit has been timelessly shackled and broken and chronologies make fuzzy borders. She has come a long way and has to go longer still. This, our first issue of the *INDIA'S QUEST* series attempts to take a look at this journey of the Indian woman.

The women's movement in India has been one long saga of struggle as Tanika Sarkar and Indu Agnibotri recount in their historical survey. The former wishes to 'enter the domain of gender in modern India with a new look at the basic assumption behind the whole exercise: that women are a subject fit for serious debate'. That they are, has been endorsed by S.K. Guba who examines the State response to the challenge of gender — '...the women's movement has become increasingly critical of the way the Constitutional mandate of "equality between the sexes" has been made a mockery of in the development process.' One doesn't have to look beyond Dipankar Das's article on the Saathin movement of Rajasthan to realise how true this is. However, Manu Kulkarni's article that underlies his long involvement with the role of women in the Panchayat endorses one small, though massively significant step in the empowerment process.

We have tried not to neglect the poetry of womanhood, or undermine their adventurous and uncompromising spirit in search of mysticism as in Rabia of Basra. Karen Armstrong and Matthew Fox crack down on the conventional notions of patriarchy in divinity and Prabbakar Begde reinstates the age old concept of the androgyne in all humans through the Ardhanarishwara. K. Satchidanandan looks at 'protest' through the searing literatures of women saying 'that the militant feminine consciousness has a long, though discontinuous tradition in the Indian languages' and they write from different intellectual and experiential positions. The chief purpose of icons is to inspire; so we have chosen two contemporary icons recognised to be path breakers — Ela Bhatt and Mahashveta Devi, pioneer and creator, genius and grit, legacy and example. The discourse of the female within the environment finds expression in Vandana Shiva's article on the subject and the plea to empower the adivasi woman in both the tribal articles.

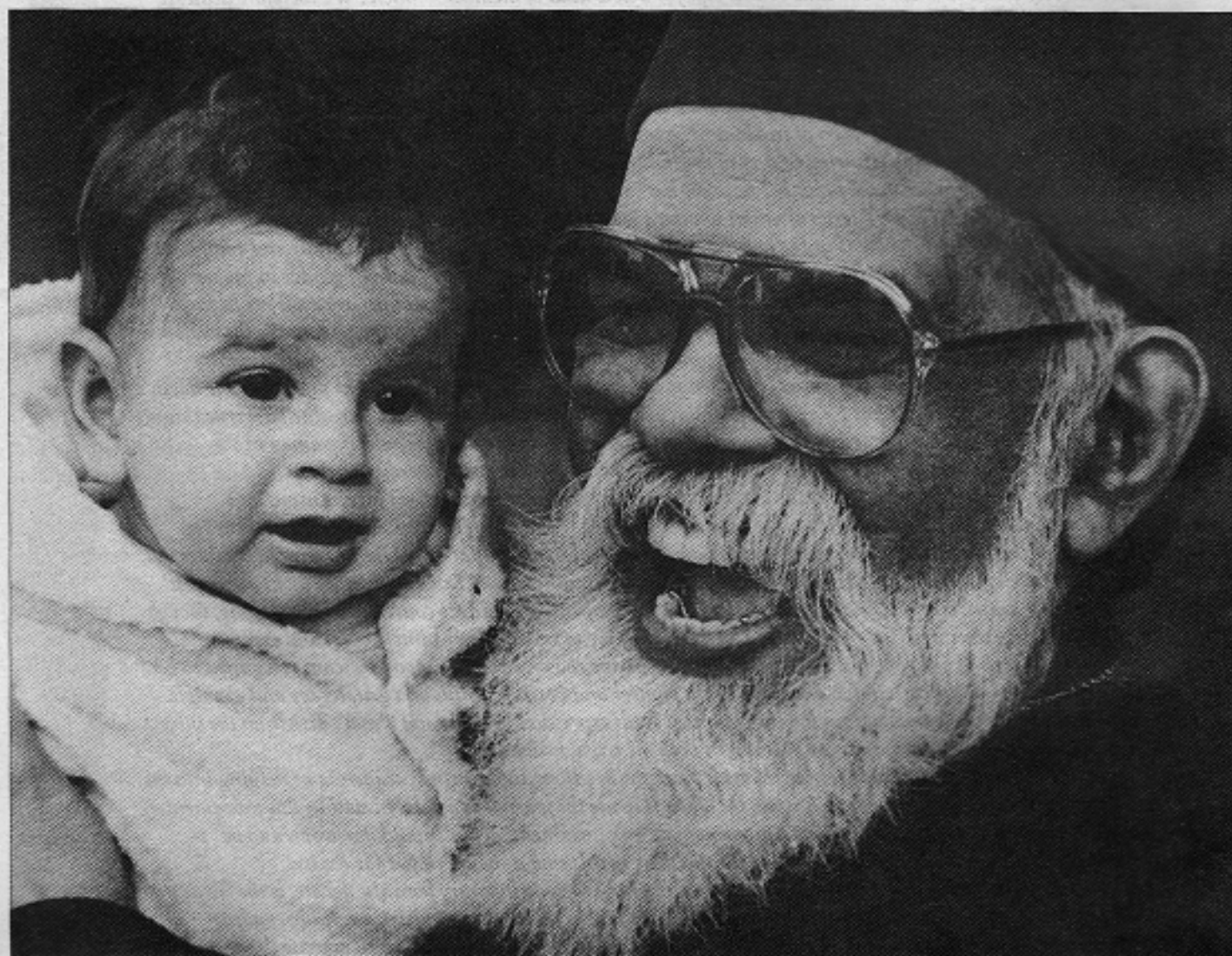
We are not particularly concerned with plunging headlong into feminist academia or delving into the schisms within the feminist block. Rather, the effort is to use the journal as a catalyst within this movement of 'protest' in order to turn it around to a movement of 'empowerment'. The demand for women to be 'included' in the national debate should cease and their involvement should be par for course.

However, a lurking danger which we cannot ignore in contemporary feminist debate is the creation of the dichotomous woman who, according to Akhila Sivasdas, is 'either ultra-modern, vampish, exuding feminine wiles and sex appeal or, servile, abject, and a non-person.' The woman has to exercise the painful choice of what she wishes to be. The much soap-operated superwoman of the skies is becoming a clone of the below-average male prototype.

The completely engendered woman is still a distant dream of free India. As we are about to fulfil our tryst with destiny this August, let us free our women from the patriarchal bonds of fake tradition. Let them educate and empower themselves. If India ever has a vision this fiftieth year of freedom, then this should be it.

Indu Agnibotri

WE DEDICATE THIS ISSUE OF THE EYE TO
DR. PAULO MAR GREGORIOS



'In a spiritual sense, his restlessness incarnates an old as ascetic-monastic quality of peregrinato spiritual wandering in a state of homelessness, detaching oneself from the structures of the present order of reality, ever searching for the glow of transcendence. However, true to the spirit of incarnation, he is also deeply committed to the issues of science and civilisation, ecology and economics, politics and spirituality, philosophy and culture.'

*K.M George and K.J Gabriel
Towards a New Humanity*

MAR GREGORIOS OF DELHI – A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Seldom in our time has the spirit of Orthodox Christianity found creative expression in response to as many human concerns as through the life and work of Metropolitan Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios. Defying the serious physical discomfort in recent years, and until the peaceful end on the morning of 24 November 1996, he was incessantly at work and prayer, not only for his Diocese and Church, but 'open to all humanity in truth and love', to use his own words.

Though filled with enthusiasm, young Paul Varghese was not in a position to continue his studies, yet he kept up his early love of reading and journalistic writing on current affairs. He accepted employment first in a private firm and then in the Post and Telegraph department at Kochi, his birthplace. Soon he became known as an efficient worker and an active trade union leader. It was an exciting time in the mid-1940s when political freedom could be seen coming. For his part, he wanted 'to serve humanity', though at that stage, the way ahead was not clear. Coming from a traditional family of practising Christians, he was aware that the Church was a natural source of inspiration for this idealistic ambition. He also felt that for drawing upon the spiritual and moral resource offered by the Church, it was not always necessary to become a priest. Much later, in 1961, he accepted priesthood. Looking back, he said of his life, "One thing led to another".

Quite by an accident of circumstance, he was offered the post of a school teacher in Ethiopia, waiving the condition that the candidate should be a graduate. He was twenty-five and he accepted. This was a turning point. News of his capability and enthusiasm reached the Emperor who was impressed by his work as well as the speed with which he could master the local language, Amharic. But the teacher opted to be a life-long student. After three mutually useful years in Ethiopia, he went to the United States for further studies.

In rapid succession, he received his BA from Goshen College in Indiana, continued his studies at Oklahoma University and the Union Theological Seminary in New York and thereafter at Princeton (Master of Divinity) and

Yale (Master of Sacred Theology). He did his doctoral studies in Oxford and Muenster and received his Doctorate in Theology from the Serampore University.

His doctoral thesis centered on the profound writings of the 4th century philosopher-bishop Mar Gregorios of Nyssa's (in the West Asian province of Cappadocia, a part of present-day Turkey) role in politics, in education, in culture. This was the context of the creative concern of Gregory of Nyssa – a 'teacher of the faith', accepted as such by both Eastern and Western Churches. His thought and teachings provided a foundational framework for his twentieth century student's work.

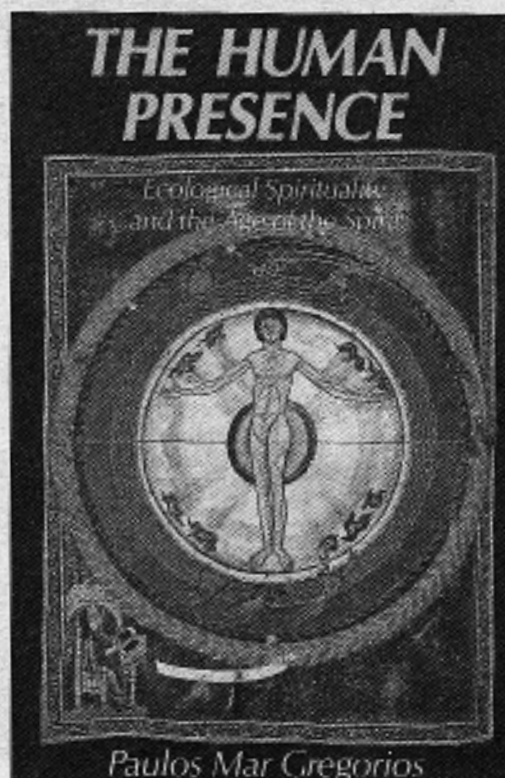
Paul Varghese returned to India, worked as an honorary lecturer at the Union Christian College, Alwaye, Kerala; as Associate Secretary of the Students Christian Movement, 1954-56; and as General Secretary of the Orthodox Student Movement, 1955-57.

During the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Sellassie's visit to India in 1956, Paul Varghese was persuaded to return to Ethiopia to be the Emperor's Aide and Advisor. In the period 1956-59, he involved himself in education in Ethiopia, promoted Indo-Ethiopian diplomatic relations and lectured at the Addis Ababa University.

Around this time, Paul Varghese decided that the time had come for him to return to his Church back in India, particularly in view of the peace being restored to the Church, following the 1958 settlement between the Catholicos of the East (successor to St. Thomas) and the Patriarch of Antioch (successor to St. Peter). He was ordained as a priest by the Catholicos, in 1961.

Fr. Paul Varghese's field of work soon shifted to Geneva, with the World Council of Churches (WCC). There he headed the Division of Ecumenical Action and became Associate General Secretary. Later, he was a member of the Central Committee and of the Executive Committee of WCC, Moderator of the WCC Commission on Church and Society, 1975-83, and one of the Presidents of WCC, 1983-91. He led WCC delegations to major conferences including the UN General Assembly Special Sessions on Disarmament, 1983 and 1988. In WCC forums and beyond, he persistently opposed apartheid and old and new colonialism. He chaired the World Conference on Faith, Science and the Future in 1979 in Cambridge (USA). He was Vice-President of the Christian Peace Conference 1976-90.

In 1975, Fr. Paul Varghese was consecrated as a bishop of the Church in India with the name Paulos Gregorios. He took charge of the newly formed Diocese of Delhi the following year, a



the Delhi Orthodox Centre in Tughlakabad, where he made a beginning with ambitious projects such as the Neeti Shanti Kendra and Sarva Dharma Nilaya.

Concurrently, Mar Gregorios was the Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary at Kottayam, Kerala, the premier teaching and training institution for the priests of the Church. He raised it to a college recognized for the award of graduate and post-graduate degrees. He established the Sophia Centre linked to the seminary.

A member of the Senate of the Kerala and Serampore Universities for a number of years, Mar Gregorios was visiting lecturer, professor or fellow at Denver, Harvard, Wooster and Princeton. He has been a fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla; Vice-President, Kerala Philosophical Congress and General President, Indian Philosophical Congress.

Among the honours and awards received by Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios are honorary doctorates in Theology (Leningrad, Budapest and Prague); Hall of Fame Award for Extraordinary Service to Peace and Human Unity (USA); Certificate of Merit for Distinguished Service and Inspired Leadership of the World Church, Dictionary of Information Biography (Cambridge); Order of St. Vladimir (USSR); Order of St. Sergius (USSR); Order of Mary Magdalen (Poland); Order of Bishop Fransiszek Hodur (Poland); Otto Nuschke Prize of Peace (German Democratic Republic); Soviet Land Nehru Award (India); Man of the Year Award 1990, American Biographical Institute (USA); Bhai Param Vir Singh International Award (India); Golden Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement (USA); Eminent Ecumenical Education Award (India); Distinguished Alumnus Award (Princeton Theological Seminary); Oscar Pfister Award, American Psychiatric Association (USA); Social Service Award, Goshen College (USA). The honours made him happier for the cause and humbler for himself.

The unusual versatility of Mar Gregorios consistently found expression in several ways:

* A capacity to transmit the essence of spiritual, philosophical and socio-political concepts with a lucidity springing from the depths of his own study and reflection.

* A constructive compassion, rooted in an ancient faith, that reaches farther than just help to those in various forms of oppression and helplessness, to ways of social restructuring, through an ethical-intellectual renewal, to address the deeper causes of the human condition.

* The illuminating search for the fundamental principles shared by the different religions of the East, as a possible basis for common understanding and endeavour.

* A spontaneous interest in natural and social sciences, as well as in historical processes, resulting in holistic contributions to contemporary thought.

He was not for other-worldly mysticism which ignored man's sinful reality; nor was he impressed by secular humanism that was unconcerned about 'the source of our being'. As he wrote in his book, *Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence* (1980), with reference to the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa, 'Thought is not scholastic to the extent of eliminating the element of mystery; but then neither is it an unintellectual mysticism.'

Mar Gregorios was of course sensitive to the need for urgent response to human suffering compounded by many-sided poverty. Of this, his modest efforts for the stone-crushers of Tughlakabad in Delhi and the orphaned boys at Talakode in Kerala are examples. What concerned him, more basically, was the futility of 'swabbing the floor without closing the tap'. He wanted the socio-economic system that regularly reproduced poverty, to be altered. This explains his life-long interest in politics. He was not in politics but of politics.

Whenever he found time, he dialogued with the leaders of both the political Right and Left. Not surprisingly he had a better wave-length with the latter. He held up a mirror to them to show how India, in particular, was impoverished not only for historical reasons but also by an ecological crisis and so-called 'secularization'.

Way back in 1978, he stated in his book, *The Human Presence*, 'The affairs of the world are largely in the hands of people who are expert at making money, waging war and playing politics.' He proceeded to present *An Orthodox View of Nature*. On Secularism, so fashionable among some intellectuals, he was equally clear and sharp. In a recent essay, he wrote, 'Secularism creates communal conflict because it brutally attacks religious identity, while pretending to be tolerant of all religions. It claims to be neutral towards all religions, equidistant from them, but it refuses to acknowledge itself as basically a religious ideology with a powerful propaganda machine' (India International Centre Quarterly, 22-1/1995).

In his book, *Enlightenment: East and West* (1989), he develops a critique of European Enlightenment. He asks the elite in India (who have so easily borrowed from the liberal humanism and the technological civilisation of the West) to step back and take a second look, 'We need to face all three forms the European Enlightenment now confronting us—enlightenment liberalism, imperialist pragmatism and socialist humanism. We have to learn from all these, but critically so. ... The better values of European enlightenment are embodied in socialism, but we need to deepen them by putting them on a more secure and more transcendental foundation. ... We have the (spiritual) resources hidden away among our people to meet that challenge. They are waiting for some new light that can quicken their creativity. This new light cannot come from top down. The job of our elite is to enable our people to become the co-authors of a new enlightenment'. The book was acclaimed in the West.

Mar Gregorios did not share the view that all religions said the same thing, but agreed that religions had common elements. Therefore, inter-religious dialogue for co-operation had untapped potential. During his twenty years in Delhi, he had extremely cordial and productive relations with the spiritual leaders of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jain and Sikh religions.

Mar Gregorios had an abiding interest in education, which he maintained through children's easy access to him, through the schools run by the Church, and by interaction with educationists, besides working as principal of the Theological College. Also, he was for reviving the tradition of women's active involvement in church affairs.

The illness during the closing years of his life seemed to have re-activated his interest in 'holistic health and healing'. He organized a major International Seminar in February 1995 in Surajkund near Delhi.

In the course of his life-long spiritual-intellectual quest with a social purpose, Mar Gregorios has authored a number of books, besides those cited earlier: *The Joy of Freedom* (1967 and 1987), *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1968), *The Freedom of Man* (1972), *Freedom and Authority* (1974), *the Quest for Certainty* (1975), *Truth without Tradition?* (1978), *Science for sane Societies* (1980), *The Indian Orthodox Church — An Overview* (1982), *The Meaning of Diakonia* (1988), *A Light too Bright* (1992) and *A Human God* (1993).

Apart from numerous periodical articles, contributions to symposia and encyclopaedia and lectures in scores of universities in India and

abroad, Mar Gregorios was the chief editor of the quarterlies, *Star of the East* (New Delhi) and *Purohitan* (Kottayam).

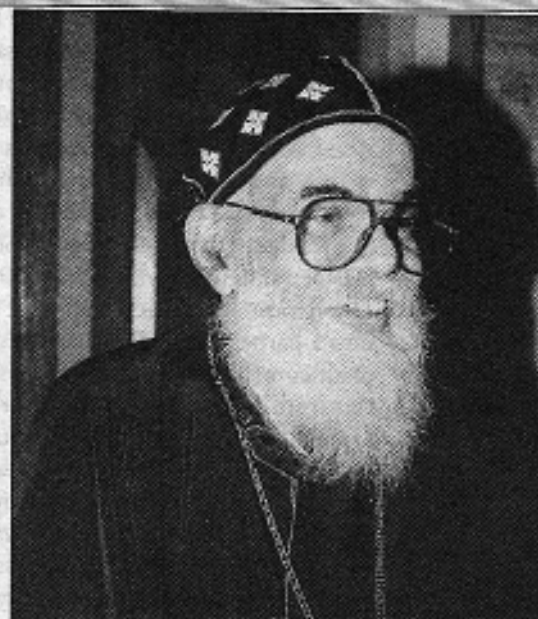
Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios lived a full life. True to his name, Gregorios, he remained ever awake. Yet such was the ambition of the agenda he set for himself, his work will have to be continued by those who share his convictions and interests. There are few countries he has not visited in his search for knowledge and friendship. The world was his neighbour. He was proficient in at least a dozen languages, modern and ancient, of Asia, Europe and Africa (Ethiopia). He was equally at home in the East and the West but he wanted Eastern enlightenment and the critical rationality of the West to maintain a dialectic relationship, instead of the overwhelming one way flow as at present. While he respected critical rationality, he also believed in revelation, in miracle, in transcendence. The Orthodox tradition does not see these in conflict. He was essentially an activist for peace and justice, scholarship and contemplation being only a means to higher social and spiritual goals. He had the courage of his Christian conviction. He cherished freedom for others as much as for him. He seldom compromised and always forgave. He was unmoved by calumny. He worked to a plan and had little time to waste, an impatience which sometimes would appear brusque. He knew his limitations and did not hesitate to publicly own them, as a corrective for himself and possibly others. Until the very end, he worked hard for peace and unity among Orthodox Christians in India. Mar Gregorios was a lover of art, architecture and music. These were, he would remind, a part of the authentic tradition of Eastern Christians. He established the *Sruti* school of music at the Theological Seminary in Kottayam and started the School of Orthodox Sacred Music at the Orthodox Centre in Delhi.

Above all, Mar Gregorios was a seeker of Truth. And, as he explains in an early book he wrote as a priest, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, truth has to be perceived in the light of tradition, in his case, the Orthodox Christian tradition. Even the *Bible* (of which he was a lucid teacher) has to be understood in the light of sacred tradition, and not interpreted at will. It is only through the realisation of truth that peace and justice, freedom and equality, the oneness of the human family and harmony between man and nature can be expected to come. Only this way, can the original concept of the word Orthodox — the right glorification of God — find expression in this world. What kept up his spirits was his trusting confidence that,

When the Spirit of truth comes,

He will lead you to the complete truth (John 16:13)

This introduction to the life and work of Father Gregorios is published as a collective exercise by the Delhi Orthodox Centre



THE EYE

TRIBUTE

THEY SPOKE...

On 23 January, 1997, Father Gregorios's friends, admirers and disciples gathered together at the India International Centre in New Delhi to pay homage to the memory of one of the city's most respected intellectuals. Some knew him well, others were his students and yet others had heard of the greatness of this individual who passed away so silently and peacefully.... Some spoke of his vision with the avid intensity of the poet, others spoke of him affectionately as they would about a father, and some others with the serenity of discipleship. Although I wasn't there myself I would like to add a few lines about this incredibly interesting person. Much as we don't wish to edit even a single line of what they spoke, we are compelled to, due to lack of space. Nor are we able to include all the speakers.

The Editor

SOME EXCERPTS

Sisters and brothers, I wish to be silent before the blessed memory of my guru, Fr. Gregorios. The *smarananjali* which I offer now hopefully will not violate my inner silence.

Guru Gregorios had a vision of a place where all the places of the world meet. His luminous mind, ever wakeful took wings and glided into the puzzled soul of that place. It was no place-Utopia, for many an onlooker. Yet it was a place *par excellence*. Flesh, blood, earth, freedom, daring, spirit, synergy, cognition, struggle, silence, turbulence, innocence, smile, compassion, community. His mortal frame was too weak to transmit to us the splendour of the galaxies that exploded out of that place, beheld from every possible angle at once.

Those who delighted in the thought process of the normal, the known, the neat, were unable, or perhaps unwilling to penetrate the dark cellar, source of all illumination. The basis of Gregorian theological reflection is the Christian affirmation of the union of God and humanity in Jesus Christ the incarnate son of God. Christ is the prototype of the mediator human being - *anthropos metorios*. The notion of humanity as mediator, known to Greek philosophers, came to his Christian vision from his venerable teacher Gregorios Nyssa, the 4th century philosopher and theologian of profound insight. Humanity appears at its best while in its mediational role. Guru Gregorios himself always stood at the border. Between this world and the myriad worlds within and beyond the space-time continuum. Between the secular sciences and the sacred discipline, between acquired knowledge and the taught ignorance of *docta ignorantia*, between mastery and mystery.... Many Christians have construed the fate of a nation about the meeting of God and humanity in Christ into a parochial and exclusivist doctrine that strikes at the root of all communication with the world. But for Guru Gregorios, this frontier character of the incarnate Christ was a springboard for all human dialogue and spiritual communion with the whole world.... This is what his whole eastern tradition taught him.

With unusual daring and humility, he made his amazing pilgrimage to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the natural social sciences, of politics and economic progress, of spiritual and intellectual methodologies and above all, ways of healing and restoring the

whole. He stood up in prophetic anger against demonic borders and pernicious dichotomies that human arrogance created between white and non-white races, between the power brokers and the poor of the world, between patriarchal males and abused women, between the custodians of mainstream culture and the aboriginal, indigenous, *adivasi* Dalits, victims of our world order. His fight with the arrogantly smug Christianity especially with its western branch, and with its agents and allies elsewhere, was fierce. His mediatorial self-understanding took him as a messenger of peace to many places where conflict and violence reigned. He flew over many a border of nations and cultures and became a herald of a new order committed to the cause of humanity. Freedom is the pivotal category in Gregorian theology. Freedom according to him, is also the single value for any new civilisation. True freedom is the creativity to desire to build the good. It is vested jointly in the person and the community simultaneously. The restlessness that one noticed in the person and the work of Fr. Gregorios arose from his constant search for true freedom.

Father Gregorios took history seriously. Yet he believed that what is now being perceived, even at its best, is distorted history. Space and time are tainted by the misuse of human freedom, and they are sometimes constraints on creativity.

He could easily and most elegantly adapt himself to the power shift era - the ever moving world of knowledge, wealth and violence at the edge of the 21st century as Alvin Toffler puts it.... He was comfortable with the proletariat as well as with the new cognitariat. He had an equal passion for our present economic order and the new order of 'softnomics' created by all kinds of software. He found no conflict in the shifting of worlds. For him, the source of all is the holy spirit of God. I quote "It is the source of all knowledge and wisdom, all skill and power. Why should we place human activity, science and technology as having a source outside the holy spirit? Of course, science and technology can become demonic as faith can become demonic. This is so in physics or politics, economics or biology the church or the world. The ruler and the law-giver, the bishop and scientist, the computer technologist and the spiritual counsellor, all with the skill and knowledge from God the Holy Spirit."

Sage Gregorios labelled by many middle class western educated men as a haughty intellectual was profoundly humble and tenderhearted. He makes a plea to the secular side because he is convinced that the redemption and the renewal of science and technology, political economy and philosophical reflection need not, cannot take place without the participation of

religious communities. Hence, the final call to both sides. Let us commit ourselves on behalf of humanity to turn the course of its development from evil to good, from destruction to reconstruction, from ugliness to beauty, from falsehood to truth, from bondage to freedom, from gloom to hope, from boredom to joy. Let us do it together. Blessed memory to you, father and teacher.

Reverend K.M. George - Theologian and writer



Father Gregorios was for me a rare friend. His scholarship and his intellectual pursuits seemed to give his attention the quality of a magic wand. Anything he attended to was transformed into vibrant animation. He was able to take ideas, trace their etymology, locate them in various debates through history and in current times and inevitably reflect on what he regarded the efforts of present philosophers to purge these ideas of their religious, ethical and spiritual concerns. Father would provoke and draw me into these intellectual adventures with him. Sometimes I felt he'd forgotten me as he moved through ideas and connections on his own.

I was just as glad to merely accompany him on these passages. But always there was a feeling of loss for the many passages he knew and could not share with me and many other seekers like me who would never revel in his adventures with him. Surely he and people like him should be universally sharing their pursuits with students and bringing to the words and ideas we encounter, the immediate quality of their personal knowledge.

Father Gregorios knew that I was a student of science nurtured in scientific rationality, now exploring philosophy and social sciences. He enjoyed baiting me. He said as much on several occasions. For if there was one strong bag he loved to punch, it was western enlightenment. I liked sparring with him because unlike so many others who proffered arguments, he didn't hit below the belt. On my last meeting with him in Tughlakabad I was prepared to take issue with him on the structure and content of his argument on Sokal and Weinberg. But that day, after he enquired after the progress of my Ph.D. he was more inclined to discuss Plotinus's theory of the soul. With his few well chosen observations he had soon recruited me gladly into another philosophical adventure.

I often felt that I was witnessing in him an enormous struggle and restlessness. I pointed out to him on several occasions that though he constantly challenged the mind-body dualism, he himself abused his body as a donkey treating it as a vehicle for his words and deeds. He laughed heartily when he heard this and continued to poke fun at his own body's inabilities. But there was in the last two years, a great impatience with himself and his inability to write and travel. He liked to recount with great amusement and detail all the non-allopathic treatment he undertook in rapid succession. Each one began with faith and hope in their miraculous recovery. Their treatment rarely lasted their whole course. They provided much mirth during and afterwards. At these times as at other times, what he specially looked forward to were Jaya's visits because they were full with disapproval for his latest fads, concern for his health and good

food. He also shared with me his own concern for her.

I miss his quiet sympathy. I like to think that even now in between arguments and jests with scholars of yore he finds time for me. Recently when my Ph.D thesis manuscript was lost and then miraculously restored to me, a friend remarked to me that I must have a guardian angel. That guardian angel must be Father Gregorios.

Padma Sarangapani



I did not know Father Gregorios for a very long time, about eight to ten years, but it was impossible to know him even a little without being struck by the man he was. I was brought up by Jesuits so the Christian environment was very familiar to me. And often he would discuss his concerns, his theological beliefs, traditions and things of that sort. I came across his presence at the SPIC MACAY gatherings with students, musicians and artistes. One of his great complaints against SPIC MACAY was that everybody who performed there were old people. What about the young? He would raise the question? The fact is, that there is a certain credibility about them having lived the time they have and it is that the children were being exposed to.

Father Gregorios used to mingle with them with a kind of easy laughter, fun, sometimes loaded fun but it wasn't simple, innocent. It wasn't fun for fun's sake but fun with a purpose. Father Gregorios' truth was administered in a certain sense like a *baiku* - just to leave a trace amongst those that knew him.

Very often, while speaking to students, he would touch upon well-known concepts through parables like the prodigal son. One of the points I remember with vivid clarity is the kind of emphasis he placed on this well known parable. The boy who left home and disappeared and another boy who stayed at home and looked after his parents as he should. This other boy, when he returned after many years of presumably wasted life, came back and saw from afar that his father was cutting a fatted calf to celebrate his return. And the young little boy who had stayed at home complained - why father, you haven't even given me a small lamb so that I might feast with my friends. But this boy who had left you for so many years, how can you celebrate his return so keenly? His answer was very strange. He said this to the SPIC MACAY students at Madras and I say this with delight. He said the boy had taken the risk, put his head on the line, walked out, tested the world and came back. He knew everything there was to be known. He wasn't talking from belief and all beliefs are finally false unless they become experienced.

Dr. Raghava R. Menon



I met Father Gregorios for the first time, in 1988, at a symposium on certain aspects of the Vedanta, that was organised by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Madras. I felt greatly drawn towards him; went up to him; and told him how much I admired the clarity of what he said at the symposium, when so much else there was so confused. He said the same thing about my talk, and promptly invited me to dinner that night. He was staying with Mrs. Sarah Chanda, his hostess in Madras. After we settled down with a drink, I asked him if philosophers ever laughed. "Well, this one does", he said. And he proceeded to prove it. He laughed so heartily that his whole frame shook; and since he continued to laugh, his hostess looked somewhat worried, uncertain about the effect the visitor had produced upon Father. But he quickly assured her that he was fine.

I met him again, in New Delhi, when I moved in 1990 from Madras to Gurgaon, practically a suburb town of Delhi. He gave me some of the books that he had written, and I read them with much excitement, for they breathed a clearer air than do many of the books written by academics, and I found in them many of my own thoughts, too.

If you want to understand a person, in the true meaning of that word, you have to explore what his or her, concerns are, which are not merely stated concerns but what in actual fact govern the person's life-energy; and you have to know the nature of the conflicts in his, or her, life. Not the *catalogue* of conflicts, but their *nature*. Only when you understand these two, can you claim that you know the person.

During a long evening which Father Gregorios spent at my house, I asked him what the nature of conflicts in his life has been. He smiled, and said: "Since you know what my concerns are, you can imagine the kind of conflicts I would have had." That is all that he said on the subject.

His concerns are expressed in his works, which people, especially the young, should study. It is most unfortunate that they are not known in India as widely as they should be. They are better known in the West. He knew Indian traditions of thought, particularly Buddhism, quite as thoroughly as he knew western thought. He was critical of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and spoke of the earlier Enlightenment in India, that of the Buddha. he was equally critical of the path that western Christianity had taken: and he spoke of the earlier Christianity that was much closer to the teachings of Jesus, the eastern Christianity. He showed how very mistaken the worship of Reason in the modern western thought has been, and he spoke of 'the unreason of Reason'.

Father was a familiar figure at a great many

seminars in Delhi, even though he shared my rude scepticism as regards their value. And then he would laugh, gently. We were together at three seminars at least: at the end of one of them I was somewhat alarmed when, with quite a serious face, he said that he had a great complaint against me. When I asked him, 'what?' he said: 'you just don't give me an opportunity of disagreeing with you in any major way.'

In all the years of my association with him, there was not one instance when he would have expressed his disapproval harshly. "Well, he (or she) got lost somewhere!", was the maximum expression of his intellectual disappointment.

Neither did I ever hear him, even in private conversations with me, mention any of the famous persons all over the world he knew well. And I deeply respected him for that reason as well. It was only from somebody else that, to give one example, I learnt of his several meetings with Michail Gorbachev. We don't know in what degree he contributed to the moral will behind Gorbachov's *perestroika*. I hope that somebody somewhere will write that story.

Bishop Gregorios touched many lives intimately, most of them Hindus, even at the first meeting. That he did, not by bishoply preaching, but by his compassion and understanding. Some centuries ago, there lived, in Varanasi, a Muslim weaver, one of the the greatest mystic saints that the world has known: Kabir. Kabir, too, was a laughing philosopher. In one of his famous *dohas*, he said

प्यो पद पद जन मुझ
चण्डित भवा न कोऊ।
झरि आखर प्रेम का
पदे सो चण्डित होए॥

Father Paulos Mar Gregorios spoke, wrote, and lived *love*.

The last time I saw him was in the auditorium of India International Centre in New Delhi. Although he was not at all well, and could move about only in a wheel chair, he had come to hear the second of my two lectures on 'Swami Vivekanand and Western Women—The Living Vedanta'. That was perfect; our last meeting, in a lecture hall, even as our first meeting had been, was in a lecture hall. I will always remember him with gratitude for his friendship and affection.

Chaturvedi Badrinath



One of the larger pleasures of editing a magazine like THE EYE are the friendships that you grow with it. Like a good friend the journal leads you by the hand to untold adventures. And so THE EYE led me to the 'adventure' called Father Gregorios. In course of time all three of us became good friends, Father, the magazine and I.

I was charmed by the twinkle in his eye as he unleashed one provocation after another. He threw a young twenty three year old friend totally off guard as he asked him just as soon as he met him, "Do you ever contemplate on the nature of reality? Not even a hello. I was fascinated by the wry humour with which he deflated bombast at ponderous meetings - in fact the very revered looking priest with the flowing white beard was

always laughing. Even when I saw him behind his large desk, his body ravaged by cancer, a month before his death, I stopped listening to him for a whole five minutes as I admired his wrinkle free face. In fact, every time I saw him I felt convinced that there was more to this man than the world knew. My only regret was that I didn't know him for long enough for him to tell me all.

Every time I met Father, I was charged with a fresh burst of inspiration. He tugged at my inertia and pessimism and made me want to go back and work harder. So much so that I began to seek him out every time I felt low. And he never failed me. I came away feeling as if I had smoked the best cannabis in the country!

Father Gregorios was our father, to all of us at THE EYE. The unbearable sadness that I felt at his death was only mitigated by the fact that he had seen and was happy with the last issue of the journal in which we had published his article and also that I was able to take to him some hot spinach soup. His poor taste buds yearned for a different taste even as his body was attacked by the disease.

Father and guru, we remember you most respectfully and dedicate this issue to you.

Rukmini Sekbar

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY: INDIA AND EUROPE

Paulos Mar Gregorios

This is a piece of writing by Father. We have selected this article because it shows his anguished concern for some of the very real problems facing India. He was a prolific writer, but we are unable to publish more of his work due to lack of space.

History attests the fact that Europe created world history. It is into that history, into the vortex of European civilisation, that all nations are now inescapably drawn: Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, Australia, the islands of the Pacific and the Caribbean.

We in India are no different. We can boast about our ancient civilisation, millennia older than that of Europe. But when under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's inspiring leadership our nation chose an identity, it was that of a 'sovereign, democratic, secular, socialist republic'. Every one of those five words has its origin in European civilisation and history; we have difficulty even in translating these concepts into any of the Indian languages. Today especially, when the dreaded spectre of communalism rears its ugly head, threatening once again to divide our nation on the basis of religion and region, we cling desperately to the Nehruvian heritage and commitment to a 'secular nation'. We are menaced by both communalism and regionalism, but it is the first that frightens us more. Communalism is fired by religious fanaticism, while regionalism is driven by geographical parochialism. We see clearly that religion is a much more powerful and explosive source of emotion than geography is or can be.

We wish to hold on to the concept of geography or region as a basic political principle. Otherwise there would be no sense in seeking a specific Indian national identity. India is, after all, a

geographical region, and we know that at present that geographical region, with its history, culture and interests, has to be the basis of our Indian identity. We are thus reluctant to abjure geography as a political principle; so we readily make concessions and adjustments to regional demands from within the country.

When it comes to religious adherence, however, we totally and vehemently deny religion as a political principle, though in practice much of our politics remains communal, based on religious or caste adherence. Our founding fathers did not fully abjure religion as a political principle. We recognise the scheduled castes as worthy of preferential treatment, not on the basis of their economic condition but their religious adherence. Our presidential orders and Supreme Court decisions have upheld the anti-secular principle that a member of a religious minority caste loses all his privileges when he changes his religion, from Hindu to Christian or Muslim. Vote-banks and candidates are still assessed on the basis of religious or caste adherence, and politicians claiming to belong to the most secular parties have no compunctions about this anti-secular approach.

While theoretical opposition to mixing politics and religion is fairly widespread in the nation, it is the cultured elite, who are most concerned about our secular identity as a nation. They feel more at home in a secular than in a multi-religious atmosphere. On the other hand, they are unconsciously apprehensive that if a non-secular, non-western identity prevails, they may lose their position of privilege. And their training makes it easy to affirm secular values as universal. Little do they realise that by doing so they are being sucked into the vortex of a world-dominating western civilisation within which there is little chance of independent steering or piloting.

But even among the elite, there is very little philosophical or fundamental reflection about what 'secular' or 'socialist' really means. Most are satisfied with slogans like 'no mixing of religion in politics', 'equality before the law', 'distributive justice', 'human rights', and so on, without sharing the European experience and reflection which led to the formulation of these concepts and slogans.

If there is an elite culture, it is comprised of three basic streams: (i) civil servants, academics and professionals; (ii) the rising business and commercial elite to whom 'success' is the highest criterion of morality; and (iii) those who desire, because it is possible, to get a larger share of the material product and thus to enjoy a higher level of bourgeois comfort and gratification. It is such an elite that passionately postures in favour of a 'secular identity', often while secretly extending patronage to one's own religious group if such patronage will yield reasonable public relations value.

For the masses of our people, particularly in rural regions, this much vaunted quest for a secular identity sounds hollow and appears inauthentic. The exception is where the communist parties have been at work for some time, and have sought to create a new identity to replace the religious or communal identity - namely, the proletarian identity and the corporate unity of the dispossessed and the marginalised. In the Indian rural base, this new proletarian-peasant identity has made only limited headway - in Bengal, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh mostly. Where the communal identity is dominant, that is, in the Hindi-Hindu belt, or among the Islamic and Sikh minorities with their growing sense of being overwhelmed and marginalised by the majority community, religious self-

understanding (Islamic or Sikh) seems a more powerful mobiliser of people than the proletarian-peasant identity.

The four large minority communities, i.e., the Muslims, Sikhs, *harijans* and tribals, seek to resist two perceived forces to upkeep their own identity. On the one hand there is pressure to co-opt them into a Hindu culture, against which they must affirm their Muslim or Sikh or dalit or tribal identity. On the other hand, they see the advance of a secular identity as a threat to the religious or tribal identity which they feel is essential to maintain as their own. The *harijan*-ness or *dalit*-ness of the *harijans* or *dalits*, for instance, is impossible to maintain without a religious identity.

It is in this context that we look at India's quest for a new secular identity and Europe's quest for a more acceptable, more united, less condemnable European identity. For Europe too is not as sure of its identity today as it was in the days when European cultural superiority was hardly questioned. Such questioning as existed was either from the Chinese sense of traditional cultural superiority, or from the Arab perception that they were being overwhelmed by European civilisation though in the past their civilisation had been superior to that of Europe; or from the more ambivalent, smug, sometimes obsequious, sometimes assertive, but usually backward-looking Indian civilisation. The European civilisation had hoped that secularisation was an inexorable and irreversible process and that therefore all religious and cultural resistance to it would be overcome by the oceanic power of modern science and the technology based on it.

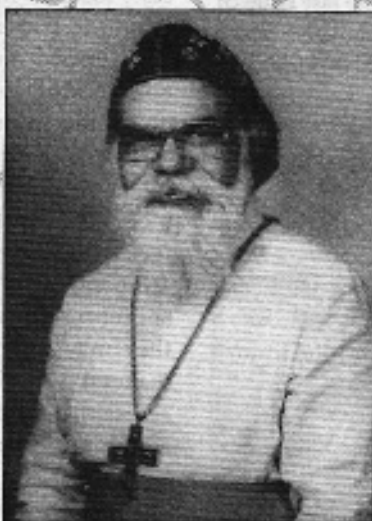
Things do not look that simple any more. No nation or region in the world is so sure of its identity any more. In the process of uniting the world and upsetting non-European identities, European civilisation has lost its own nerve. Reason, having revolted against authority and tradition, comes to feel something lacking in itself, something that makes its once majestic stance of self-sufficiency now look weak, pathetic and on the verge of a breakdown. The European Enlightenment which came with a blaze of light that blinded with its intensity, is now giving way to the twilight that warns of the night's approach. The State, on which the Enlightenment placed much hope to reshape human beings to order, has failed to deliver the goods. Education, the other pillar of hope of the Enlightenment, also has failed to bring enlightenment. Logic and experiment or rationalism-empiricism, which is the heart of modern science, cannot lead us into the heart of truth, it now seems. Science and technology, the new messiah, seems to have been captured by the demons of war and profit and threatens to engulf humanity in a global catastrophe. 'I love that philosophy which raises up humanity', Diderot had said; but today philosophy runs away from humanity and its concerns, to play trivial games with language and logic. Europe is bewildered, though she finds that hard to admit. It is in this context that India seeks a secular identity, patterned on European values too easily assumed to be

universal. We still pin our hopes on a State-initiated programme for entering the twenty-first century as a technological nation. We formulate dreamy, impractical educational plans to reach that goal in a little more than a decade. Meanwhile, Bofors, Bhiwandi and Bhopal blister our eyelashes and make vision confusingly blurred. The Himalayas get progressively denuded, our cities fester with poverty and pollution, and our countryside languishes in lethargic stagnation. Politics falls prey to aristocratic privilege, patriarchal leadership, regional parochialism, linguism, communalism and a scramble for power that brooks no moral reins.

Still we talk about a secular identity based on European liberal values as the antidote to all our problems. What else can we do? Where else are we to look? To China? To Japan? The suggestion here is, let us look everywhere, but let us concentrate first on two aspects: on the European Enlightenment from which we seek to derive our secular-liberal values; and on our own Indian understanding of Enlightenment—the way initiated by the greatest genius India has produced and whom the world has received as a great light, the Buddha. Let us look at our own tradition of enlightenment, be it Hindu or Buddhist, and see if it can still shed some light on our path. Let us understand the dialectic between these two understandings of enlightenment. Perhaps we will end up more confused than before. But out of darkness light may spring forth—not the twilight that ushers in the night, but the one which marks the dawn.

India's quest for an identity and Europe's quest for its identity are not isolated from each other. The twain must meet at a cross-roads from which all of us can find new paths forward. Neither India nor Europe is final. It is humanity that must find its way. India must not blindly follow Europe's way, but should learn from its successes and its errors; this may help not merely to find our own independent way, but also to be a small beacon that lights the path for all nations and regions of humanity to find their various ways.

So if we sometimes look at Europe's way a bit harshly, it is neither to condemn nor to feel superior. There seems to be no way forward without learning from Europe and thankfully receiving much of what that little continent has contributed to humanity. In receiving that with gratitude we do not want to cease being ourselves. We must receive also from our own not so inglorious past, and share that with all-Europeans included. We embark on a look, not merely at the European Enlightenment, but also at the European psyche which has experienced that Enlightenment. That way we might help Europe escape that 'decay of the West' that her prophets of gloom, from Oswald Spengler to Jean Paul Sartre, have predicted for centuries, and perhaps save ourselves from walking into the same gloom and darkness. Before we do so it may help to be clearer about what we mean by identity, secular or otherwise. What does Indian identity or European identity mean?



India's quest for an identity and Europe's quest for its identity are not isolated from each other. The twain must meet at a cross-roads from which all of us can find new paths forward. Neither India nor Europe is final. It is humanity that must find its way.



A DISCUSSION BETWEEN DR. PAULO
MAR GREGORIOS AND PROF.
RUDOLPH DE LIPPE
Excerpted by R.P Singh

I was a young Ph.D. research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) when I met him the first time at the 55th Session of the All India Philosophical Congress held at Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar from 28-30 December, 1980. Since then I have been meeting him in various national and international seminars. The following article is an interesting discussion between two great philosophers of the world, Father Gregorios and Prof. Rudolph De Lippe.

Prof. Rudolf de Lippe was born in 1937 in Berlin. He had a Masters in National Economy and was a Doctor of History. He was deeply involved with painting and the theatre. After years with a publisher and later, with Alain Danielou's International Institute for Music Traditions of the World, he became a philosopher. He wrote a history of the human body in the Renaissance in close association with Theodor W. Adorno. He is a practitioner of the Sa-Zen tradition of Count Karlfried Durckheim since the early sixties. Consequently his research in modern occidental thought and practice acquired a comparative character. He pursues anthropological aesthetics in the non-Eurocentric mode and applies it to matters of our time. He was one of the first fellows of the Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin and is the initiator and director of the intercultural exchange *Karl Jaspers Lectures on Matter of our Time*, an official contribution to the World Decades for Cultural Development by UNESCO.

HOW REAL IS REALITY?

FATHER GREGORIOS

The words 'real' and 'reality' do not have exact equivalents in the Indian languages.

Sanskrit has many words like *satya*, *vasthava*, *yadhartha* and *paramartha*, but their meanings do not come from the same category structure as 'real' and 'reality'. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary gives me the meaning of 'real' as existing as a thing or occurring as a fact; not imagined or supposed; not imitation, but genuine; and of 'reality' as the quality of being real; all that is real; the real world as contrasted with ideals and illusions.

These meanings are developed in the context of secularism, which denies any knowable, transcendent or eternal realm. John Dewey wanted to abolish the dualism of God and Nature, affirming only a self-existent, self-sufficient Nature as ultimate reality. To be loyal to the temporal, one had almost to be hostile to the transcendent, or at least should ignore it. In this context the 'real' is the natural, that which is available to scientific knowledge, what is not so available being regarded as not real. What is therefore called 'reality' is the natural order or things, to the exclusion of the transcendent.

In the Indian tradition, the natural order or *prakerti* cannot exist without dependence or contingency; it cannot be self-existent or self-sufficient. In the earliest tradition of the *Sankhya*, we notice the concept of *mulaprakerti* or 'fundamental nature' as an inverted tree with the trunk and the branches manifest to us, (i.e. *vyakta*) while the roots remain in the unmanifest or the *avyakta*. The *Bhagavadgita* (ch 8, v. 18) puts the ancient *Sankhya* doctrine in the mouth of Lord Krishna:

*Avyaktad vyaktaya sarva: prabhavanthyaharagame
Ratbryagame praliyanthe tatraivaavyakta samjnake.*

From the unmanifest all that is manifest comes to be at the dawning of day. When the night comes (all things) flow back into the same unmanifest, as we call it.

The Indian tradition thus does not conceive of a static universe as 'reality'. Nor does it see 'reality' as self-sufficient and self-contained. We see the whole of it as a process, part of it manifest and part unmanifest. We are ourselves part of it; our very consciousness, *buddhi*, arises out of the manifest or *vyakta* and arises as a temporary phenomenon within the manifest world. Both subject and object are equally aspects of this passing world.

We do make a distinction between two basic levels of reality or truth – *paramarthaikasatta* and *vyavaharikasatta*, or ultimate truth and working reality. The distinction was developed by Nagarjuna and very much used by Hindu thinkers of the *Advaita* or non-dualist school. In ultimate reality there is neither time nor space, neither form nor name, and therefore no change or differentiation. What the West calls 'reality' is for the Indian tradition, part of the *vyavaharikasatta* or *samvritisatta*, a creation of the human consciousness under certain conditions. Ultimate reality is *sajatiya-vijatiya-svagatya-bheda-rabita*, i.e. without differences

within the same genre or of a different genre, with no internal distinctions, not sublimated by subsequent experience, remaining ever the same.

Nagarjuna would say that this world or 'reality' is neither real nor unreal, neither true nor untrue, neither true and untrue at the same time, neither not true and not untrue at the same time, but simply *pratityasamutpanna*, i.e. something co-originating under certain conditions of the perceiving consciousness and whatever confronts it. The Vedic tradition also ascribes to the human consciousness the capacity to transform the eternal, the changeless into the temporal, changing and differentiating the power of *maya*.

HOW REAL IS REALITY?

RUDOLF DE LIPPE

In his lecture, Prof. Rudolf de Lippe probes again the question of reality both through the theory of knowledge and so-called 'common sense' in practical life. Modern civilisations are dominated, explicitly or implicitly, by a concept of one reality, defined in terms of cause and effect, measurable in space and time, based on facts, and target-oriented. We need to understand which history these options stem from and to reconsider other options about more dimensions of reality in order to decide what importance 'realistic' reality should be given in the context of clear relations among different substantial concepts of realities - R.P. Singh

Reality as a modern concept is the material equivalent to reason (parallel to the problem of subject and objectivity). Especially after nuclearphysics, reality cannot have an identifiable and localisable object. The term 'reality' has been abandoned in quantum physics.

Let us look at the beginning of the 'Mental Era'. I shall illustrate it with two Greek myths—*Perseus and the Medusa: The Mirrored Glance* and *Oedipus and the Sphinx: The Refusal to the Path of Life*. In the first myth, there were two friends. One of them met a girl one day and said to his friend, "Today, I met a girl - she was so beautiful, glamorous and awesome, that I could not see her." The friend said, "I give you this mirror and when you meet the girl next, place this mirror in such a way that when you look into the mirror, you actually see the face of the girl. Seeing reality without facing it." In the second myth, Oedipus asks, "Tell me of a creature who moves with two legs in the morning, with four legs the whole day, with three legs in the evening and without legs in the night?" The answer is - the human being.

Some Major Elements in Rationalist Reality

Reality is identifiable and measurable and what is measurable is manageable. Facts can be defined in terms of centrality where reality converges both in terms of bigger (being nearer) or smaller (being farther away). Euclidean geometry is the topography on identity of things in terms of measurement. Everything which is different from something must be found in different space and time. We have to accept different virtues with human face too. Sometimes, finite human beings try to play at God. Hiranyakashyap, for instance, said, "I do not want to die either day or night, inside or outside, by animal or by human...." So the Narasimha avatar of Vishnu emerged - something in between.

In the framework of rationalist reality, it can be said, "There is one reality which is identifiable and reconstructable. It has causality as a condition for reconstruction. It is measurable in space and time as two independent paradigms. It has facts as opposed to fiction (belief vs. knowledge). It is target-oriented and has practicability."

We have to accept virtues of otherness against global universalism. To open rooms for the in-between that has been subdued, aligned, forgotten and annihilated in the cosmic, religious, communal, inter-subjective, physiological and other realities. The soul of the world lives through the encounters of its creatures - the other reality - play (*lila*). Love, esteem and dignity are the criteria for material needs, supplies and production. And freedom is the existential response of human beings.



This presentation was followed by a question and answer session.

Dr. R.P. Singh: Father, if by 'real', we mean something to be perceived and built up within that certain perspective, how do we deal with it? Are our *pramanas* competent enough to grasp the 'real' or are they, as Popper says, verisimilitude - very similar to the 'real'? If the universe is taken as 'circle' moving circularly, then what do we get out of it? Circular ideas seem to be confused ones. If the universe is taken as 'changing', what do we expect from such a 'change'? Change has to be law-governed and target oriented as Prof. Rudolf de Lippe said. We can not give scientific immunity to the notion of change. My conviction is that under certain circumstances things are there and under certain circumstances *I happen to be there, then I can say this is real.*

Father Gregorios: Well, Shankara, the Advaita Vedantin, has advocated three *pramanas*: *pratyaksha*, *anuman* and *apta vachanah* and likewise he has developed three realities: *vyavaharik*, *pratibhasika* and *paramarthika*. Nagarjuna had asked a question, "by which *pramanas*, are all your *pramanas* derived?" This was the question Hegel had raised against Kant - by which category are all our categories deduced? Few years back, I was participating in one All India Philosophical Congress. In the Executive Meeting a discussion took place on why Indian philosophy is not popular? I replied that it was so cut off from our *vyavaharikasatta* that categories cannot present it. This is what our postmodernists are doing. They deny everything that is unrepresentable and are still trying to present the unrepresentable. That is the whole problem.

Let me say that the notion of movement in things and events has already been abandoned by the West. A man is here and he has to go to the USA. Already a movement has taken place. In dance, for instance, the soul invites the unmanifest to manifest itself through gestures and expressions. People transform their whole life on the basis of certain self-realization. Kabir or the Buddha, for instance. Buddha was neither an aggressive missionary nor a crusader but an enlightened, kind-hearted man. In meditation, Buddha did not realize the Absolute but he certainly realized some movement which enlightened him. So he developed the idea of *pratyasmudpada* - dependently co-originating.

Dr. R.P Singh has been engaged in research and teaching at JNU, Delhi, for the last eighteen years. He is the author of four books: A Critical Examination of Immanuel Kant's Philosophy, Kant and Hegel, Dialectic of Reason and Philosophy: Modern and Postmodern. He has published seven articles in The Philosopher's Index, the Philosophy Documentation Centre, Bowling Green State University, USA

Illustration: Jyoti Sabi.



- ▶ *The current upsurge of mindless violence in our societies may be least in part due to the over-chemicalisation of the body and brain.*
- ▶ *To stop thinking and start being still is a very curative technique.*
- ▶ *The scientist in the white coat is now a surrogate of the priest in the black cassock.*
- ▶ *According to the conception of our ancestors, the highest form of knowledge which ennobled man was contemplative knowledge. It was on the basis of this knowledge that the highest form of religious life was conceived. But in the new conception (of a technological civilisation), the highest form of knowledge is that which gives man the greatest mastery over the forces of nature.*
- ▶ *The chariot of human development has gained momentum but seems to be running amok without a charioteer. No one seems able either to stop it or get it back on course.*
- ▶ *Christ was both male and female in one. Man must mediate not by eliminating the feminine qualities and replacing them with masculine ones or vice versa. He must become fully human in a male-female way by the combination and sublimation of all male and female characteristics of human nature.*

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Vol. IV No. 1&2
The Dispossessed and
the Consumed

ARDHA NARISHWARA

PRABHAKAR BEGDE



The philosophical import of the Ardhanarishwara form is the idea that the male and female principles are inseparable and ever found together in cosmology. It also represents two fundamentally opposite cosmic forces, *purusha* and *prakriti* which are constantly drawn together to embrace and fuse with each other but separated by an intervening axis.

When the world began, Brahma, the creator, tried to produce living creatures, but they failed to reproduce themselves, since he had neglected to create women. Unable to solve his problem, Brahma asked Shiva to help him. Shiva took the form of an androgyne, making the left side of his body into a woman; the two parts separated, merged in sexual union, and produced all living creatures.

The philosophical import of the Ardhanarishwara form is the idea that the male and female principles are inseparable and ever found together in cosmology. It also represents two fundamentally opposite cosmic forces, *purusha* and *prakriti* which are constantly drawn together to embrace and fuse with each other but separated by an intervening axis. According to later mythology, Parvati became half of Shiva's body. One reason for this is, as legend would have it, that Shiva once embraced her so closely, in gratitude for her having fed him when he failed to get any food by begging, that their bodies merged into one. The second account states that the sage Bhiringi had taken a vow to walk around only Shiva in worship, refusing to include Parvati. In order to thwart Bhiringi's attempt, she persuaded Shiva to let their bodies merge into an androgynous form. Bhiringi was equally firm in his resolve and assumed the form of an insect and bored a hole through the middle of the couple. The third account says that in order to prevent Shiva from dallying with other women, Parvati made him join his body with hers.

In the *Markandeya Purana* occurs the following story. Markandeya says that Rudra and Vishnu are the creators of the universe and they form the Ardhanarishwara aspect of Shiva. Here the allusion is to the Harihara form of Shiva, in which the female generative principle is identified with Vishnu. The same idea of creation by the merging of the two principles is also conveyed by the symbols of *linga* and *yoni*.

In the *Vishnudharmottara*, Shiva as half-female is identified as Gaurishwara in Chapter 55. The left of his body should be Parvati, and Shiva should have four hands. The rosary and the trident should be in the right hands, in the left should be a mirror and a lotus. Shambhu should be with one face, with two eyes and adorned by ornaments. The left part of the body should be of his beloved. *Prakriti* with *purusha* are marked by a close union and celebrated as Gaurishwara.

The *Matsyapurana* gives a very elaborate description of the figure which has two arms. The *Lingapurana* gives a brief description which is closer to the Elephanta image of the half-female form of Shiva: *The excellent lord has half of his body in female form. He has four arms wherein he holds the boon to be bestowed, the gesture of fearlessness, the trident and the lotus. He is stationed in the form of a woman as well as man, bedecked in all ornaments.*

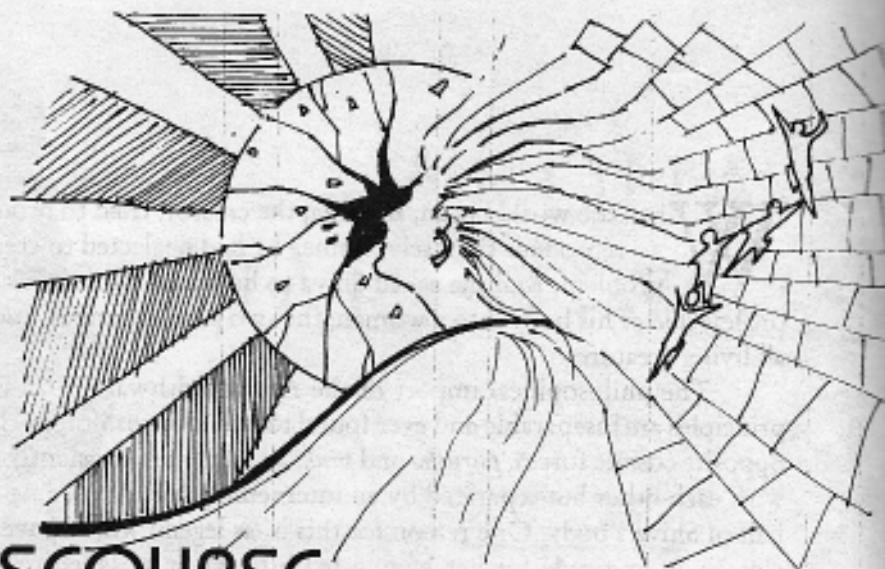
Only when the distinction and limitation of male and female is overstepped and the non-personal *brahman* realised can liberation occur. Thus Ardhanari conducts the mind beyond the objective experience in a symbolic realm where duality is left behind.

In its highest form the androgyne represents the ideal of the union of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), the union of worshiper and the god with whom he is, in fact, consubstantial, the simultaneous experience of longing and union, desire and satiation.

The earliest available Ardhanarishwara images are from the Kushan period and these are also seen on some of the gold coins of the later Kushan rulers. He is shown as being two-armed, carrying a noose in his extended right hand and a trident in his left. The noose is a symbol of Pashupati, the controller of beasts. The bull, Nandi, is shown behind the figure. The multi-armed Ardhanarishwara became popular during the Gupta period.

It is interesting to note that the Greek writer, Stobaeus refers to the images of Ardhanarishwara.

Prabbakar V. Begde is a rare combination of practicing architect, writer, architectural historian, columnist and Indologist. He is the author of Ancient and Medieval Town Planning in India, Forts and Palaces of India and Living Sculpture. A self-taught scholar, he has been greatly influenced by the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy, E.B. Havell and Stella Kramrisch. He looks at Indian sculpture as an architect and his approach is refreshingly different, highlighting the intricacies of iconography and classical poetry. He is also a visiting faculty at the TVB School of Habitat Studies, New Delhi.



THE FEMININE DISCOURSE

A CANDID LOOK AT THE PAST AND PRESENT

TANIKA SARKAR

We will unfurl the national flag once again this August. As it rises up the pole ready to break itself free from its folds, the women of India will yet again wonder about their own freedom. Questions such as whether 'women' are a subject fit for discussion have long ago been answered. But where are they today? Have they moved at all, or are they running around in circles rooted to the same spot? Tanika Sarkar's brilliant article takes a candid look at the 'ladder' of the evolution of women from the 19th century till today. This piece is an edited version of a much longer article which will be published by us in a Commemorative Book in this, the 50th year of the Indian independence.

Let us enter the domain of gender in modern India with a new look at a basic assumption behind the whole exercise: that women are a subject fit for serious debate.

Celebrating the fiftieth year of our freedom is bound to lead to many kinds of stocktaking, and, among them, the status of Indian women will be a major area of concern. It is appropriate to see whether the colonial patterns of gender relations were significantly modified or overturned in post colonial times.

There are many indices to decide whether the relative position, conditions and status of women have improved or not, and depending on the criteria that we choose to use, we will get widely different and even sharply conflict-ing answers. Yet, ultimately, such an exercise may not yield a monolithic conclusion since there are very many kinds of women in the country with very different trajectories of life chances and opportunities. Even if we do arbitrarily insist upon a unitary category of 'the Indian woman', it is impossible to reach an overall aggregate: there may be one picture for education and literacy, a very different one for mortality and health, and yet another one for employment; whereas, for their political role and activity, we may come up with something that does not tally with the conclusions drawn from other indices. As for their formal legal status and what is done within it, do we look at constitutional provisions, recent legislation, or to their actual, concrete

application and effectivity?

Instead of going into each arena of opportunities and activities separately, and then trying to cobble up a single answer out of the mosaic of data, let us enter the domain of gender in modern India with a new look at a basic assumption behind the whole exercise: **that women are a subject fit for serious debate.** Why and when did women, with their relationships with men, their families, the world, come to be seen as a way of measuring the extent of national progress - or its absence? Add to it yet another novelty of modern times: that women, starting with a privileged few in the 19th century, and increasingly coming up from a wider social canvas have joined in, inflected and, on occasion, even emerged as dominant voices within the debates. Why did so many people choose to talk about women from the 19th century onwards, how could women get a chance to participate in what was being said? To ask what can be thought and talked of at a given point of time that had not been thought or talked about earlier, to see if groups that are conventionally excluded from articulating opinion in public, are doing so now, is to explore what is happening to the limits of the possible.

Our modernity was initiated by, an endless, anxious and multiphonal argument about what Indian men had done to Indian women. Once the fact of colonialism sank into consciousness, almost the first thing that Indians started to discuss was not so much the legitimacy of foreign rule as the position of their women. In fact, a large part of the modern public sphere, made up of print culture, a new tradition of journalism and the medium of the new vernacular prose,

was created out of the discussion of 'private' family matters, intimate things concerning the women of the household: age of marriage, form of marriage, possibility of divorce, polygamy, widowhood and education and the age of consent question. With the expansion and deepening of nationalist mobilisation and struggles from the early twentieth century, possibilities of women's participation came to be a major area of discussion.

Previously we had finalised, finished, authoritative codes of gender norms, frozen in the sacred laws and in custom. If there were contestations, they would be oblique, individual, non-theorised. They would take the form of everyday defiance and transgression, protest masked and translated as sorrowful dirges, mourning rites, tales, proverbs and songs that indicate a sense of the unfairness of the world. Why, then did the shock of a novel, extreme and absolutely closed form of foreign rule that was colonialism, get translated into explorations into gender, if that was not a part of the discursive traditions of the country? Answers had been provided earlier in terms of exposure to a liberal westernist education that taught Indians to question women's subjection, and, eventually, the subjection of all Indians. More recent and more critical interpretations have shifted away from a celebration of the new education. They have criticised more sharply, the limits of the gender perspective of the new colonial middle classes and the liberal reformers. They have attributed the winds of change to a desire to emulate Victorian moral codes, to ape a bourgeois form of companionate marriage and an alien model of modern domesticity.

The process, however, was enormously complex, and many more facets of that history need to be recovered. The first interrogations emerged out of **modern, dissident religious sects** – the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj. It has been suggested that their religious dissent isolated these reformers from larger networks of family, kinship and neighbourhood ties. Their upper caste, middle-class social moorings would prevent, in most cases, a really critical engagement with issues of peasant exploitation, or the exploitation of low castes. Before the formation of nationalist associations in the last few decades of the century, there was an inability and an unwillingness to reflect on the colonial condition: Rammohan Roy, for instance, recommended a more thorough-going colonisation of the country by Englishmen as a road to modernisation. There was a conviction in the transformative capacities of the new laws and the new education, a gradualist faith in the necessity of a period of tutelage under a more

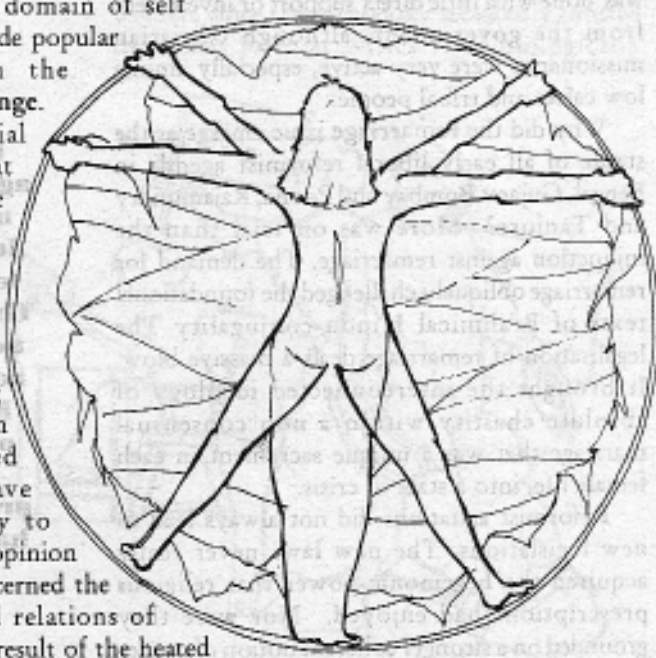
successful power and cultural system. Given these constraints on possibilities of social and political activism, and given the fact that Indian elites were excluded from administrative and entrepreneurial initiative due to the discriminatory nature of colonial rule, there was little else they could take up and campaign to change.

I would also add a few other factors to this picture. The very fact of political subjection brought forth a new and acute sensitivity to the **question of bondage, of domination and subordination**. The subjection of women to male rule at home was obvious and immediately visible. Could domination and subordination be advised for one group of people, and interrogated for another? Was political subjection a divine punishment for an anterior act of conquest? Could men claim freedom while they enslaved their own women? Such questions troubled not only a host of male reformers, but it is interesting that early women writers also posed the women's question within an identical language of freedom and un-freedom. The same language was often used to describe the subjection of the country as well as the subjection of women.

There were other factors as well. Since the late 18th century, British rule had exempted the domain of **personal laws** – largely dominated by gender relations – from State interventions, unless customary or scriptural sanction could be cited for change. Two very important historical developments followed from this. In the first place, the **domestic sphere** – where women featured prominently – came to be regarded as a site of relative autonomy. It was envisioned both as the last bastion of a vanished freedom, preserved from foreign interference, as well as the possible site of an emergent nation. In the second place, personal laws as a domain of self-activism, led to a wide popular involvement with the processes of **legal change**.

The new material conditions, that structured the discursive field – vernacular prose, print culture and journalism – enabled a continuous interaction among diverse opinion from people who needed simply to have vernacular literacy to express and receive opinion on themes that concerned the everyday lives and relations of ordinary folk. As a result of the heated and continuous debates about practices and laws

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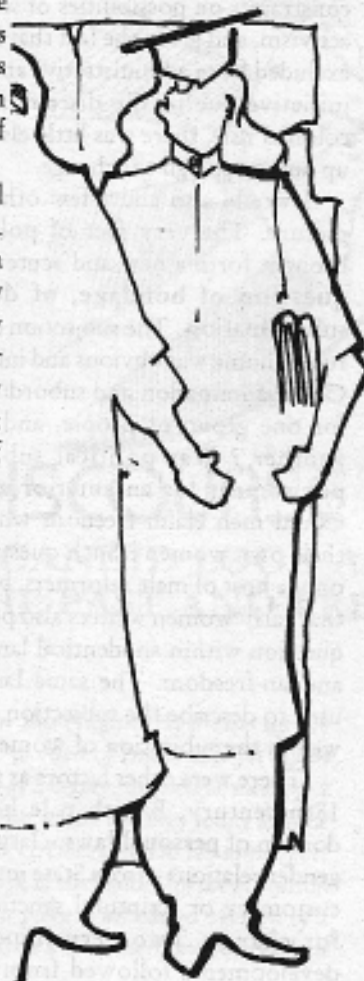
around women that the reformist legislation provoked, gender norms were detached from the realm of sacred prescription or unselfconscious commonsense, and their ideological basis was made completely transparent. Never before in our history has such a demystification of domestic values taken place.

In the course of early 19th century legal reform, yet another crucial shift took place. **Legality clashed with religious prescription** in unprecedented ways. Sati, hitherto an universally accepted sign of womanly virtue, was now legally classified as a crime. Widow remarriage, so far castigated by all pious Hindus as an entirely illegitimate desire, was now made legal. Not that the laws actually inverted the actual pattern of patriarchal practices. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the chief campaigner for legalising remarriage, died a disappointed and frustrated man. Yet the laws opened up a gap, a tension, between what was normatively illicit and what became legally permissible. Moreover, it produced arguments about what had always been more or less unquestioned as a sign of the good woman. The injunction against remarriage could no longer rule in comfort, assured of unquestioning allegiance. It had to defend itself, fight its case and battle for survival.

What legal reforms did for *shastric* injunction, **educational reform** would do for customary prohibitions. Till late in the 19th century, there was a powerful customary belief in Bengal that educated women were destined to be widows. Reformist endeavours strained against this belief system, and starting with Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, was able to make some education normative for girls from at least well of families by the closing decades of the century. All this was done with little direct support or investment from the government, although Christian missionaries were very active, especially among low castes and tribal people.

Why did the **remarriage** issue emerge as the staple of all early liberal reformist agenda in Bengal, Gujarat Bombay and Poona, Rajamundry and Tanjore? More was on trial than the injunction against remarriage. The demand for remarriage obliquely challenged the foundational texts of Brahminical Hindu conjugality. The legalisation of remarriage dealt a massive blow. It brought the interconnected ideology of absolute chastity within a non consensual marriage that was a unique sacrament in each female life, into a state of crisis.

Reformist agitations did not always lead to new legislations. The new laws never really acquired the hegemonic power that religious prescriptions had enjoyed. Nor were they grounded on a stronger coherent notion of gender justice or individual rights. Their most significant



Reformist agitations did not always lead to new legislations. The new laws never really acquired the hegemonic power that religious prescriptions had enjoyed.

historical function was, then, not so much the creation of a full fledged alternative order as much as **contestatory, destabilising and problematising the old order.**

Over the Age of Consent controversy, when a ten year old girl died in Calcutta, after being raped by her husband, the language of **willed consent** clashed too obviously with the revivalist imperative of justifying a state of non interference and status quo in the Hindu patriarchal order. In the last decades they, therefore, moved away altogether from the domain of personal laws and evolved a new project for the salvation of the community. Vivekananda shifted out of the domestic sphere altogether and gathered around a group of male ascetics who would rejuvenate Hindu society through full time social service.

While the all-the male solidarity was a specifically Bengali resolution, in Punjab and in the United Provinces, the revivalism of Swami Dayanand marked out a very different trajectory for itself. The departure lay in his ascription of a central location to the woman within the new community of Aryas and in his insistence on introducing quite drastic changes in conventional domestic practices. While he shared all the reformist planks, he overturned every liberal premise on which the reformist agenda was based. He propagated widow remarriage, end to child marriage, polygamy, and the bestowal of education on women. However, liberal reformers had advocated remarriage by normalising the sexual desires of child widows whereas Dayanand advised it in the interests of a better economy of child bearing wombs. Each change, thus, denied individual affect and yoked the woman to the demographic and pedagogic purposes of an authoritarian community.

Liberal reformers had depended on State legislation as an instrument for social change. The **legal identity** was an excess that gave the woman, at least notionally, a sphere of personal rights outside the rule of the family and the community that had so far structured absolutely every aspect of her life. Within the Arya Samaj, however, the same reform plans were not tied to an external agency but were conveyed exclusively through a reformed family and community. The woman's integration with the two was thereby rendered complete and absolute. Her new opportunities neither arose from nor cleared a space beyond the family-community complex. The reformed community was using the reforms as a mark of and a fiercely asserted claim to superiority over other religious sects and communities - initially, against unreformed Hindu Sanatanists, but, later, almost exclusively against Muslims.

Was all this happening to a very limited and elite section of women, and hence had no real significance for larger female groups in the

country? It is true that reforms and reformers functioned within the orbit of their familiar middle class, upper caste problems and possibilities. In fact, few would support the regulations for the curtailment of working hours in factories for women and children in 1891, when an Act was passed to that effect. There is little evidence of concern for problems of livelihood among peasant women or the problems that tribal women faced over encroachments of a modern market system into their life worlds. Education was largely confined to affluent, upper caste urban families – whether it was home based or was provided through formal school. Though it was interesting to note that low caste reformers like Jyotirao Phule and his Satyashodhak Samiti in Western India, knitted up the oppression against high caste women along with the social and material exploitation of low castes as a sign of the wide ranging scope of Brahminical rule.

So far as concrete legal and educational reforms are concerned, much of the 19th century effort was restricted within the Hindu community. Modern education was a domain that even Muslim men entered rather late, after substantial resistance from the orthodoxy. Sayyid Ahmed Khan, who had to fight a hard combat to legitimise the western educational model and western science in Quranic terms, was very firm that women needed no formal schooling, and, in fact, must be shielded from Anglicisation while men needed to absorb a generous dose of western ideas. However, both the orthodoxy and the liberals developed a consensus in the last decades of the century that women must be given a gendered education at home.

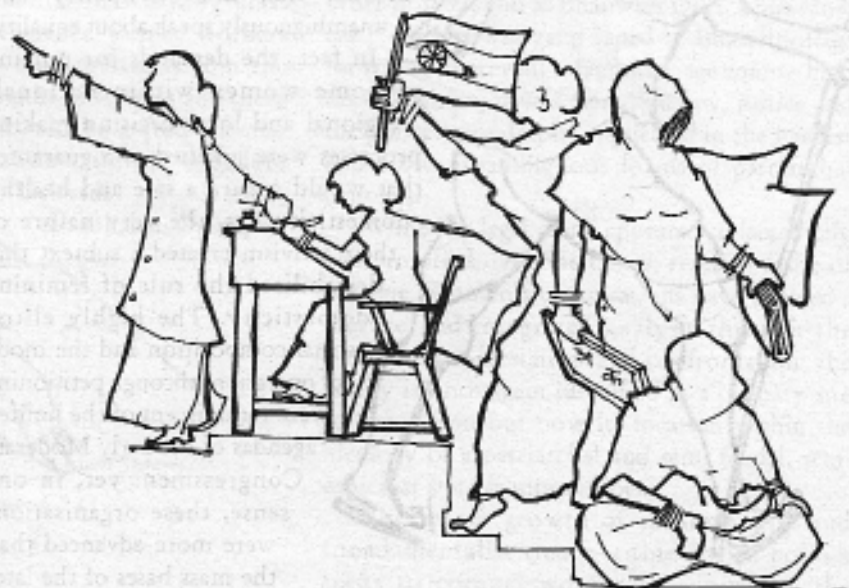
While formal education for Muslim girls came very late in the day, a different kind of contestation over women's rights was going on in the Anglo Indian law courts throughout the 19th century. They laid the basis for the Shariati Act of the late 1930s. The British Government was formally committed to privileging Quranic and Shariati regulations over customary norms and practices, except in some specified categories. On the whole, however, an insistence on scriptural injunctions over property matters did provide for larger entitlements for daughters and widows, and the courts more or less did uphold that. Despite the restrictions of the purdah system on the deposition of evidence in court by women, we find women tenaciously fighting out property disputes in court, and establishing a series of precedents, granting them a larger share of inheritance, over and above that granted under custom, in the name of the holy scriptures.

We, therefore, find a broad similarity in patterns of changing pedagogic ideology for

Middle class Indian women staked out a claim to the public sphere first of all through their writing, while most of them were still physically restricted to the domestic domain. Educated women were publicly applauded as achievers who held out an alternative way to female self realisation.

both Hindu and Muslim women. In both cases, the reformist endeavours targeted middle classes and above. Muslim women began to take a pioneering role in setting up schools for girls whereas, early Hindu reformers were almost all men. However, there was, at that stage, more concern with rights to property and inheritance among Muslim women, rather than with reform of marriage laws which preoccupied Hindu reformers. The judicial rather than the legal arena emerged as the major site of struggle over rights and entitlements for Muslim women. And, reform of gender bias within property laws was more unequivocally tied to Islamic principles than was the case with Hindus.

Middle class Indian women staked out a claim to the public sphere first of all through their writing, while most of them were still physically restricted to the domestic domain. Enabled by the growth of vernacular prose that, being close to their everyday speech they found it easier to master, and the print culture that gave them access to cheap and plentiful reading matter, they also found an eager market for what they had to say about their own condition. Legislative activities and the social reform movements had created great interest in domestic issues and women were the privileged authorities in the subject. It is interesting that through these writings they immediately joined the reformist campaign for women's education. Educated women were publicly applauded as achievers who held out an alternative way to female self realisation. The first generation of women graduates, doctors and teachers were seen as saviours of their sex. Their achievements were celebrated less in terms of professional possibilities and economic independence as for proving the innate intellectual capacities of women, since the orthodoxy steadfastly insisted that such male activities were biologically



There has been considerable debate about whether the broader and more militant political activism that the Gandhian Congress offered to women empowered them in the long run, or whether it diverted and constricted an autonomous women's movement and its focus on gender issues.

impossible for women. It is interesting that Rukmabai who had created a furor in the late 1880s by asking for the dissolution of a marriage contracted without her consent in her infancy, and who had almost received a prison sentence when her husband accused her of non restitution of conjugal rights, went on to train as a doctor. These individual achievements had, by the turn of the century, multiplied enough to turn into networks and associations of educated women who got together to seize the initiative for gender reform. There was a transition from writing from and about domestic confines in isolation to the formation of public collectivities and solidarities.

Women were now taking the lead in setting up public institutions for reform: philanthropic associations, schools and widow's homes. Pandita Ramabai, Sister Subbalakshmi, Mataji Tapaswini, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein and others were pioneers in this field. All these women were bitterly criticised by the custodians of their respective religious communities for betraying their faith and for surrendering to deracinated standards of behaviour. But it was also possible for them to found the nucleus of alternative communities of reformers and women.

From public institutions for reform and welfare, women leaders moved into the corridors of mainstream political activism by the second decade of this century. From educational and philanthropic work, associations like Women's Indian Association, the National Council of Women in India and the All India Women's Conference went into movements for suffrage, marriage reform, and participation in municipal and legislative politics for women's uplift.

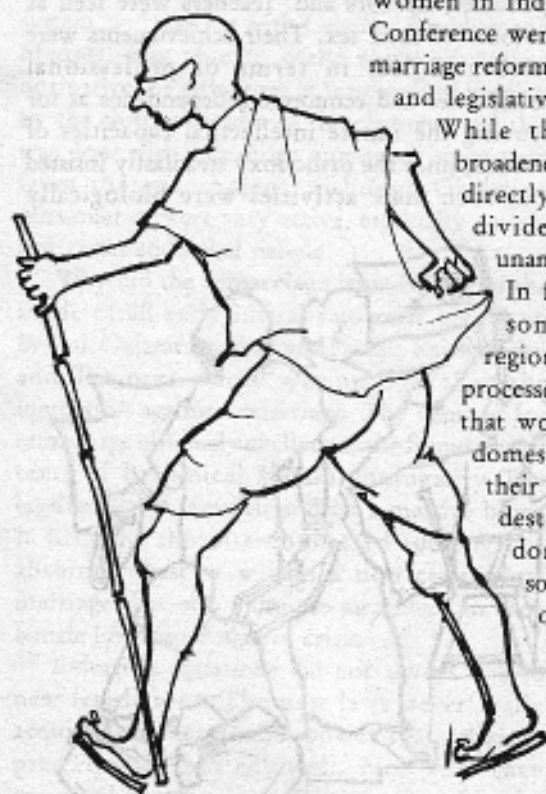
While the area of public activism broadened, the language of reform did not directly challenge the public/private divide, nor did it openly and unambiguously speak about equality.

In fact, the demands for putting some women within national, regional and local decision making processes were justified as a guarantee that would ensure a safe and healthy domesticity. Yet, the very nature of their activism created a subtext that destabilised the rule of feminine domesticity. The highly elitist social composition and the mode of operations through petitioning were reminiscent of the limited agendas of the early Moderate Congressmen: yet, in one sense, these organisations were more advanced than the mass bases of the later

Congress. At a time of worsening communal relations throughout the country, they represented all religious communities. Women advanced issues that concerned women across religious divides. Later, the radicalisation of the Congress politics in the Gandhian era, and the incorporation of large numbers of non elite women within the national movement, created a problem of choice for the women of these associations that had earlier decided to eschew direct involvement in agitational politics in order to prioritise gender reforms. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy found it very difficult to maintain neutrality when Sarojini Naidu was arrested in 1930. Yet, too close an involvement in nationalism proved divisive and cost them the sympathy of their Muslim colleagues.

There has been considerable debate about whether the broader and more militant political activism that the Gandhian Congress offered to women empowered them in the long run, or whether it diverted and constricted an autonomous women's movement and its focus on gender issues. Gandhi himself espoused the ideology of separate spheres for men and women, although he was critical of specific abuses like women's seclusion. There was also a more emphatic cultural nationalism that attributed all social problems to westernisation and modernity and refused to critically explore gender problems within Indian traditions. In any case, the urgent pressures of mass struggles made it difficult to focus adequately on an agenda of social reform. The feminisation of the country as Mother India, the deification of the Motherland as the supreme deity, coincided with a shift away of focus from the problems of flesh and blood women.

Yet, even as Gandhi theoretically ratified the ideology of separate spheres, in practice, he opened up all forms of political activism to all women. In consequence, there was an effective equality within political practice. Moreover, this



Judicial application would often defeat the content of the laws while the laws themselves were premised on a protectionist ideology rather than on a commitment to equality. In any case, women's radicalism produced a religious back-lash that legislative activity failed to contain.

equality was available to middle class women as well as to tribal and peasant women. During the Civil Disobedience movement, peasant women became dictators of Congress units at village level while Marwari women from deeply conservative families joined street demonstrations, picketed shops and courted arrest. The principle of non violence saw to it that women's political activism would not appear as too radically transgressive an act. Gandhi's religious idiom clothed the movement in an aura of a sacred ritual and nationalist politics thereby became more naturally a legitimate feminine activity. By pulling in women from most social strata within a shared political domain, nationalism also created immensely widened networks of female solidarity. This political activism created some of the authentic sources for Indian democracy and disseminated a highly articulate and informed political understanding among women despite widespread illiteracy and poverty.

To an extent, the same dialectic operated in the mass movements of the Left. Women from very oppressed and poor social strata, from working class, tribal and poor peasant milieus, worked within urban class struggles and peasant armed struggles in Bombay and Calcutta, in Tebhaga and Telengana movements. Yet they were excluded from certain areas of activism, absent from most decision making processes, and insensitively thrust back into old roles after the collapse of the movements. In working class movements, women workers would militantly join the ranks of strikers and there would be noted women trade union leaders Ushatai Dange, Prabhavati Dasgupta,

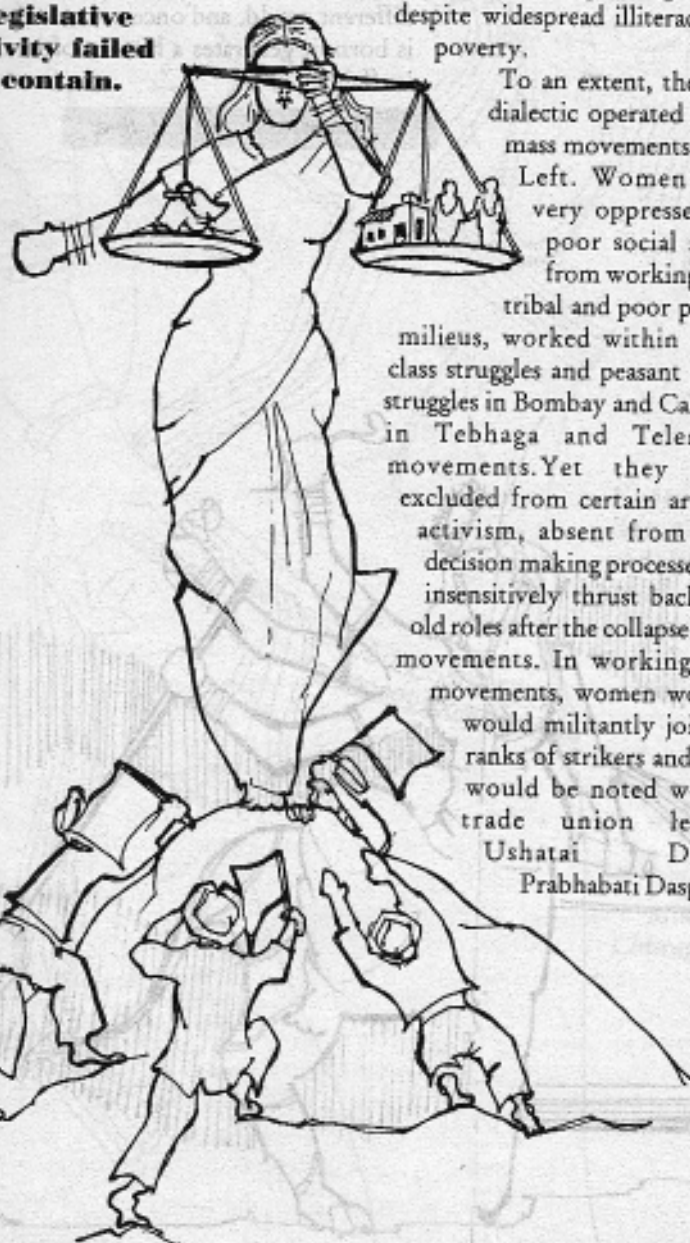
Santoshkumari Gupta. Yet, women's own demands were routinely placed at the bottom of general charters of demands and working class women, for all their militancy, would be absent from union leadership.

When freedom came to this country along with a bloody holocaust and the partition, the liberal premises of Indian nationalism were embodied in the secular-democratic constitution which recognised all adult Indian women as full fledged citizens of the country. At the same time, a very different logic of State sponsored patriarchy manifested itself when Hindu women, abducted into Pakistani territory during the riots, were collected by State agencies and returned to their families without their consent being solicited. The tension between a formal commitment to equality and deeply ingrained patriarchal commitments among the executive, legislative and judicial organs of the state had been at play since then.

A new wave in women's movements was on its way from the 70s, in the wake of a number of radical class struggles in the late sixties and seventies, where women participated on a wide scale, but on somewhat unequal terms. Autonomous organisations developed along with an intensification of women's groups within mainstream Left parties. A more radically reoriented notion of gender justice that the movements espoused, forced the state to embark upon a spate of fresh legislative activity especially on rape and dowry. Yet, judicial application would often defeat the content of the laws while the laws themselves were premised on a protectionist ideology rather than on a commitment to equality. In any case, women's radicalism produced a religious back-lash that legislative activity failed to contain. As *sati* was spectacularly celebrated at Deorala in 1987, and the criminal instigators were released on court order in 1997, and as Bhanwari Devi, a poor low caste woman was gang raped at Bhatari village for trying to prevent infant marriage among high caste Thakurs, it was clear that law, justice and the police were deeply implicated in the hardest and most unambiguous forms of patriarchal controls.

While the legal arena appears fundamentally compromised, it, nonetheless, remains a site of struggle. Women's organisations have evolved a mature and integrated analysis through the process of contestation and confrontation: the family is once again identified as a primary site of oppression but now its location within the ideology of a patriarchal and semi feudal, semi capitalist state is more evident.

The recent growth of communalist and fundamentalist trends within Indian politics seeks to compel women to submit to the



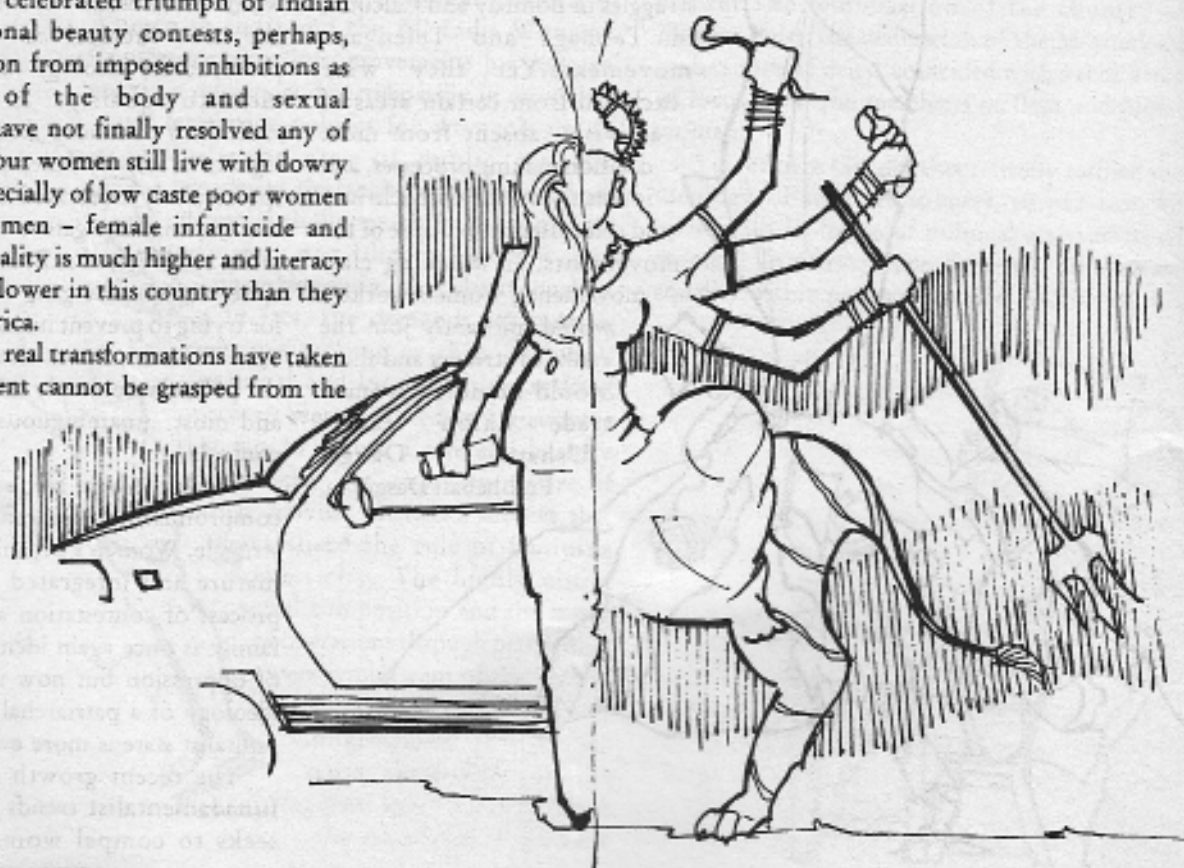
discipline of community custodians. Majoritarian violence puts a hard choice before Muslim women between struggles for gender justice and the preservation of community integrity. Fundamentalism uses the image of an endangered community to reinforce its rule. The violent Hindutva movement, which has so far insulated its women from active politics, now offers them leading and dazzling roles within a movement targetted against secularism and minorities. It also seeks to co-opt parts of feminist agendas to promote an anti-Muslim campaign by asking for the Uniform Civil Code. At the same time, the statements of some of its women leaders leave us in no doubt that the Code that they envisage need not be democratic or gender just in the least. Under pressure from divisive forces, the women's movement finds it increasingly difficult to go in for integrative mobilisation in the cause of gender justice. Women are increasingly seen as sectoralised into communities, and gender-based commonalities are sought to be undermined. This comes at a most opportune moment for the current phase in Indian capitalism whose structural adjustment programmes will create immense hardships for poorer women. It also helps upper caste and semi feudal authoritarianism in rural areas.

Have we moved ahead at all, or are we running round in circles, rooted to the same spot? Again, there is no easy answer. The wider mobilisation of elite women for prestigious management and bureaucratic jobs must be set against the increasing vulnerability of large masses of women as **employment** becomes rare or informal and casual, and as prices rise all the time, cutting into their already limited share of domestic resources; the much celebrated triumph of Indian women in international beauty contests, perhaps, reflects less of liberation from imposed inhibitions as **commodification** of the body and sexual objectification. We have not finally resolved any of the old problems and our women still live with dowry deaths, sati, rape - especially of low caste poor women and of labouring women - female infanticide and foeticide. Female mortality is much higher and literacy rates are considerably lower in this country than they are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Yet very broad and real transformations have taken place, and the full extent cannot be grasped from the

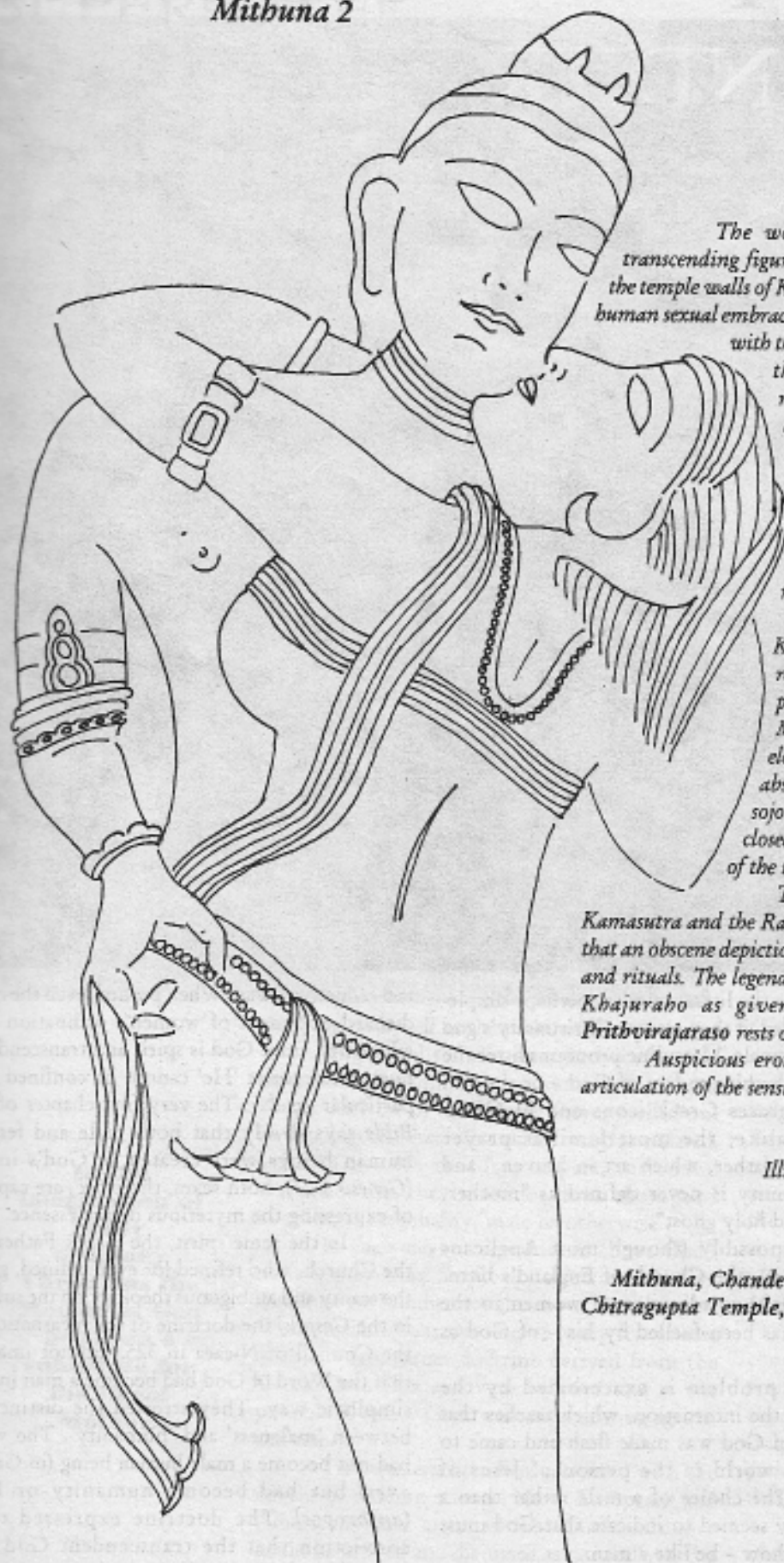
limited achievements in literacy, education and professional opportunities, significant though they certainly are. The real measure of changes in the domain of **political activism**, the **capacity for struggles and protests**, the understanding and the world view that sustain the protests, and the collectivities that enable and embody them. Perhaps, a gauge of the distance that we have travelled lies in the Bhateri Case. In a sense, it may be taken to demonstrate the very stagnation of the situation, since, after a century of struggle and legislation against the infant marriage custom, the issue remains alive. Yet, a great deal has changed. In the 19th Century, it was male reformers from highly educated, elite backgrounds who initiated debates against child marriage. In recent years, Bhanwari, a low caste, poor rural woman from Bhateri, faced police torture and upper caste gang rape to prevent the forced marriages of one year girls of upper caste Thakur families. Only movements bring forth a different world, and once a women's movement is born, it generates a history of its own that is ineffable.

Illustrations: Amit Matbur



SCULPTURE OF THE ISSUE

Mithuna 2



The world's most self-absorbed and self-transcending figures of amatory couples are to be seen on the temple walls of Khajuraho and Konarak, symbolising the human sexual embrace as an earthly echo of the bliss of identity with the ultimate reality. The Upanishads use the metaphor of sexual union as representing the union of atman with brahman and purusha with prakriti. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad observes, 'In the embrace of his beloved, a man forgets the whole within and without – in the very same way, he who embraces the Self knows neither within nor without.'

The miracle of the Khajuraho and Konarak mithunas is their serenity, reflecting supersensate values of which the physical embrace is merely an expression. Most of the images are innocent and elegant in their love play. The knowing self-absorbed smile of the lovers reflects their sojourn to the beyond, their eyes are always closed, dwelling on the tensions and delights of the inner world.

The traditional postures (*bandhas*) of the Kamasutra and the Ratimanjari are often repeated. The belief that an obscene depiction averts evil and sin is found in folklore and rituals. The legends associated with the famous temples of Khajuraho as given in the *Mahabakbanda* of the *Prithvirajjaraso* rests on this conception.

Auspicious erotic depictions became vehicles for the articulation of the sensuous taste of the cultured elite.

Prabhakar Begde

Illustration: Indrani Sen

Mithuna, Chandela, 11th century AD,
Chitragupta Temple, Khajuraho

DIVINITY AND GENDER

GOD IS NOT A

KAREN ARMSTRONG



The choice of a male rather than a female body seemed to indicate that God must also somehow be like a man.

Forgive the literal-minded, perhaps simple-minded, if they assume Christianity's god to be male. Masculine pronouns litter the scriptures; the hirsute face of God – or the Son of God – graces Greek icons and El Greco paintings alike; the most familiar prayer begins, "Our father, which art in heaven," and the holy trinity is never defined as "mother, daughter and holy ghost".

Just possibly (though most Anglicans hotly deny it), the Church of England's bitter dispute over the ordination of women to the priesthood has been fuelled by his – of God as male.

The problem is exacerbated by the doctrine of the incarnation, which teaches that the Word of God was made flesh and came to live in the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The choice of a male rather than a female body seemed to indicate that God must also – somehow – be like a man.

This, of course, is to regard God in far

too reductive a way. When pushed, even the most diehard opponent of women's ordination will admit that since God is spirit and transcends all human categories 'He' cannot be confined to a particular gender. The very first chapter of the *Bible* says firmly that both male and female human beings were created in God's image (*Genesis* 1:27); both sexes, therefore, are capable of expressing the myterious divine essence.

In the same spirit, the Greek Fathers of the Church, who refined (or even defined, given the scanty and ambiguous theology on the subject in the *Gospels*) the doctrine of the incarnation at the Council of Nicaea in 325, did not imagine that the Word of God had become a man in any simplistic way. They stressed the distinction between 'maleness' and 'humanity'. The word had not become a male human being (in Greek, *aner*) but had become humanity or Man (*anthropos*). The doctrine expressed their conviction that the transcendent God was permanently allied with the human race – with

SUPERMALE!



So muddled has religious thinking become in the West that most people probably think that to interpret religious language symbolically is a modern compromise, almost a dilution of faith. They forget that in the ancient world, symbolism was part of the essence of religion; the divine was in some profound sense a product of the imagination rather than a matter of fact. People would create images of God that would touch something buried within them and convince them – if only momentarily – that life had some ultimate meaning and value. Often even in the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam these images of the divine would be female.

One of the very earliest icons of the divine seems to have been female. In Europe, Asia and the Middle East, hundreds of little figurines dating from the early neolithic period have been unearthed which probably represent the Great Mother Goddess – but scarcely any male effigies from that era have been found. Some of the earliest religious artists instinctively depicted the creator of heaven and earth as a naked pregnant woman. At this time when agriculture was just beginning to transform human life the fertility of the soil was experienced as a sacred force. The earth seemed to produce plants and nourish them rather as a mother gave birth to a child and fed it from her own body.

Later, when human beings created the plough which penetrated the earth more efficiently and later still began to build cities, more masculine qualities were revered as manifestations of the divine force which kept all things in being. Male gods started to personify the sacred.

But even then people did not forget the Great Mother. She appeared alongside the male deities in the various pantheons of the ancient world: she was Inanna in Mesopotamia, Ishtar in Babylon, Anat or Asherah in Canaan, Isis in Egypt and Aphrodite in Greece. She was still revered as the source of life and since there can be no life without death she was also the Lady of the Underworld. In the ceremonies symbolising these spiritual truths women served as priests as a matter of course, as the earthy representatives of the Great Mother.

Polytheism, the worship of many gods, constantly reminded the faithful that the divine could never be confined to any one human expression. The mystery which underplays the fragilities of life was pictured in gods and goddesses who resembled human beings, images that expressed a sense of affinity with the sacred.

Such a many-faceted vision of the sacred is still preserved in Hinduism. Monotheism, however, would permit only one symbol of the divine. There was always therefore the possibility

the females as well as the males of the species.

The sacred, the Greeks argued, could never be contained within a human system of thought. So the doctrine of the Trinity (never spelled out in detail in the *New Testament*) was formulated, again in the 4th century, in part, to remind Christians that they must not think about God as a simple personality, male or otherwise.

In their devout agnosticism about God's nature, they were far closer to Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu thought about the ultimate. Western Christians who never really felt at ease with the trinitarian doctrine derived from the Greek Orthodox and who believed that it was possible to define God, were thus steering against the tide.

This western literalism increased with the advent of modern science. Many Europeans and Americans now assumed that God's existence could be proved and discussed as rationally as the phenomena they were investigating in their laboratories.

In the imagination of many ordinary Christians the Mother of God has been a substitute for the Great Mother.

Symbolism was part of the essence of religion; the divine was in some profound sense a product of the imagination rather than a matter of fact.



Tara, the Shakti of Avalokiteshwara who was born from his tears. Like Shiva's wife she has a double character - threatening and gentle. Nepalese bronze 18th century A.D.

incorrigibly male deity.

The God of Moses was a god of war. He was Yahweh Sabaoth - 'Yahweh of Armies'. Murderously partial, he sided with his own people the Israelites but drowned the entire Egyptian army in the Sea of Reeds and ordered the extermination of the native population of Canaan, the land he had promised to Israel.

This tribal deity was later revered as the creator of heaven and earth, the source of law and justice and the most powerful of all the gods. He jealously demanded that the people of Israel bind themselves by a covenant to worship him alone.

The Bible's description of Yahweh Sabaoth made it all too easy for worshippers to see their God as a male being. Yet monotheists still felt the lure of female icons of the sacred and tried to balance the biblical imagery by introducing feminine imagery into their theology. In the *Book of Proverbs* (composed in the 2nd century BC), God's wisdom, by which he created the world, is depicted as female (8:20-31). The divine attribute through which God expresses himself in the material world is thus a feminine presence to balance the masculine creator of *Genesis*.

Much of the religious quest can be seen as a search for a harmony that was supposedly the original and proper condition of humanity. Nearly all cultures evoke a 'Golden Age' at the beginning of time, when men and women were at one with one another, with the natural world and with the gods. In the biblical story of Eden, the man and the woman were at first 'not ashamed' of the sexual difference between them. One consequence of their fall from grace was an imbalance between the sexes. The woman would always yearn for her husband but he would merely dominate her (*Genesis* 3:16).

In their conception of the divine, monotheists tried to rectify the sexual imbalance of their tradition in order to evoke the sense of wholeness that is invariably associated with the sacred.

Christians had not only inherited the martial God of Moses but believed that this God had become incarnate in a male human being. Yet they too developed a counterbalance

through the cult of the Virgin Mary. Officially, theologians have insisted that Mary is a mere mortal but in the imagination of many ordinary Christians the Mother of God has been a substitute for the Great Mother. The Greek Orthodox have always seen salvation less as forgiveness of sin than as a process of 'deification' (*theosis*), whereby human beings become, like Christ, permeated by divinity. As the first and most perfectly redeemed Christian, Mary is thus a prototype of this divinised humanity.

The cult of Mary, becoming popular in the 12th century, at the time of the Crusades, satisfied a desire for a less macho Christianity. Muslims are reminded that God embraces both sexes each time they read the *Koran*. Each recitation begins with the *bismallah* - "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate (*al-Rahman*), the Merciful (*al-Rahim*)." Allah which is Arabic simply means 'The God', is masculine in grammatical gender, but *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* are etymologically related to the word for 'womb'.

Shias revere the person of Fatima, Mohammed's daughter and mother of the line of inspired *imams* who embodied the divine truth for their generation. As such, Fatima is associated with Sophia, the divine wisdom which gives birth to all knowledge of God. She has thus become another symbolic equivalent of the Great Mother. But Sunni Islam has also drawn inspiration from the female.

The philosopher Muid ad-Din ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) saw a young girl in Mecca surrounded by light and realised that for him she was an incarnation of the divine Sophia. Muslims are reminded in the *Koran* that humans can experience and speak about God only in symbols. Everything in the world is a sign (*aya*) of God; so women can also be a revelation of the divine. Ibn al-Arabi argued that humans have a duty to create theophanies for themselves by means of the creative imagination that pierces the imperfect exterior of mundane reality and

glimpses the divine within. Jean Paul Sartre defined the imagination as the ability to think of what is not present.

Imagination must be a religious faculty, since it enables people to envisage the eternally absent and elusive God. Creative monotheists have associated female images, redolent of peace, of healing with the sacred. Perhaps this type of spirituality can counteract the cruelty and hatred that monotheism has so often been party to. If so, let God (rather than 'the Lord') be praised.



Ishtar of Babylon - the Great Mother. Terracotta, Sumerian period.

Courtesy: The Economist

ORIGINAL BLESSING

MATTHEW FOX

Original Blessing is the author's best-selling introduction to creation-centred spirituality as opposed to the fall-redemption model of Christian spirituality. Fox coined the word, 'creation spirituality' which speaks to the mystic and artist within us all and helps us to discover these often buried parts of ourselves. The following excerpts underline the concept that creation-centred theology is feminine centred and the gradual distancing from this formal theology has led to the imbalances we perceive today.

'Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science.'

Alfred North Whitehead



What religion must let go of in the West is an exclusively fall/redemption model of spirituality – a model that has dominated theology, Bible studies, seminary and novitiate training, hagiography and psychology for centuries. It is a dualistic model and a patriarchal one; it begins its theology with sin and original sin, and it generally ends with redemption. Fall/redemption spirituality does not teach believers about the New Creation or creativity, about justice-making and social transformation, or about Eros, play, pleasure, and the God of delight. It fails to teach love of the earth or care for the cosmos, and it is so frightened of passion that it fails to listen to the impassioned pleas of the *anawim*, the little ones, of human history. This same fear of passion prevents it from helping lovers to celebrate their experiences as spiritual and mystical.

This tradition has not proven friendly to artists or prophets or Native American peoples or women. Is not recovering a creation-centred spirituality recovering two sources of wisdom at once, that of nature via science and that of nature via religious traditions? The creation-centred tradition seems to combine the best of both worlds in our search for wisdom today.



Patriarchal religions and patriarchal paradigms for religion have ruled the world's civilisations for at least 3500 years. The creation-centred tradition is feminist. Wisdom and Eros count more than knowledge or control in such a spirituality. Together, feminist women and men are invited to rebirth a religious vision that is more creation-centred. And they can have fun doing it, because play is a grace in such ritual-making and rebirthing. Feminist Susan Griffin names the ecological crisis of our time when she says, 'Man's notion of nature is again threatened.' A patriarchal religious vision such as that fall/

redemption spirituality offers cannot deal with this deep 'threat.' Creation spirituality welcomes a new stage in nature awareness. Author Carol Christ raises the tension that exists among feminists who are energized by nature and those who are energized by political movements. But the creation spiritual tradition sees this as an unnecessary dualism comparable to the religious dualism of salvation versus creation. Political movements for justice are part of the fuller development of the cosmos, and nature is the matrix in which humans come to their self-awareness and the awareness of their power to transform. Liberation movements are a fuller development of the cosmos' sense of harmony, balance, justice, and celebration. This is why true spiritual liberation demands rituals of cosmic celebrating and healing, which will in turn culminate in personal transformation and liberation of peoples. Not only was the pre-patriarchal period feminist, but the post-patriarchal period will be as well, provided patriarchy, in its deep pessimism, leaves us a world to play on and work on and celebrate.



It will come as no surprise to anyone to suggest that the fall/redemption spiritual tradition which has ignored creativity as our divine birthright and responsibility has not invested heavily in preaching to us about the motherhood of God. The patriarchal tradition has pretty much ignored the implications of God's motherly side and of our responsibility to develop the mother in ourselves, whether we are women or men, married or celibate, heterosexual or homosexual. If Eckhart is correct when he declares that 'We are all meant to be mothers of God,' then it follows that we are all meant to be mothers. There is a potential mother, as Heschel insists in the prologue to this section, in each and every person. After all, does birth happen from a single parent? Does the father alone birth the child? Every artist – and as we have seen this means every person made in the image, and likeness of God – is called to mother. As Jung put it, creativity arises 'from the realm of the mothers.' The putting down of motherliness – which can, ironically, express itself in a pseudo-elevation of literal motherhood, as in sentimental celebrations of 'Mother's Day' in a patriarchal culture – accompanies the putting down of the artist within and among us.

The feminist movement and with it the creation-centred spiritual tradition have celebrated and retrieved the non-literal meaning of motherhood. Adrienne Rich, who defines feminism as 'developing the nurturing qualities of women and of men,' has, like Eckhart, awakened our consciousness to the question,

ORIGINAL BLESSING



MATTHEW FOX

**God is as
much Mother
as Father.**

What is nurturing? What would it mean to live in a nurturing society, one where even men nurtured self, one another, and others? Surely it would mean from a theological point of view the recovery of the tradition of God as Mother. The tradition of

the motherhood of God is rich not only in those Western sources I have cited at the beginning of this theme but also in the matrifocal religions of the Wikke and Native American traditions and indeed wherever religion preceded patriarchy. Frederick Turner, for example, celebrates the depths of the 'aboriginal mother love' which is so much richer than Western mother love and which he finds in Native American religions.

The motherhood of God is celebrated wherever pantheism is

celebrated, wherever images of roundness and encircling take precedence over linear imaging. Hildegard says, "Divinity is like a wheel, a circle, a whole." Julian's image of 'a mother's cloak' is deeply maternal. Julian frequently uses the image of being enclosed, as when she says, "The deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are enclosed." Eckhart too, when he speaks of how all creation 'flows out but remains within,' is arousing in us a maternal symbol of pantheism and enclosure. He applies this reality not only to our enclosure in God but also to our relationship to what we give birth to. In other words, the work of every artist, divine or human/divine, is a maternal work. One is never separated from what one has birthed, or as Isaiah puts it, "Does a woman forget her baby?" It is telling too how Julian and Eckhart and Mechtilde all rely on the image of 'flowing out,' for this too is a maternal symbol. Birth for them is not a trauma and certainly not an event for an operating room; rather it is a 'flowing out,' Julian writes, 'God is the true Father and Mother of Nature and all natures that are made to flow out of God to work the divine will be restored and brought again into God.'

There is something flowing about the maternal side of God and of existence; this flowing is the opposite side of what Ma in *The Grapes of Wrath* called the 'jerky' dynamic of the male. There is also implied here a respect and dialectical reverence for nature's birthing processes rather than a dualistic or panicked approach to them. St. Hildegard also images God on many occasions as pantheistic and therefore maternal. She writes

of 'this circle of earthly existence, just as Eckhart preached about 'the circle of earthly existence,' just as Eckhart preached about 'the circle of being in which all beings exist.' And Hildegard says, 'God hugs you. You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God.' This is motherly talk. It is enveloping, embracing, welcoming, inclusive, cosmic, and expansive. God is a welcoming mother in this tradition.

I wonder, when meditating on these beautifully pantheistic and maternal images of God, if the reason pantheism has been such a threat to patriarchal religion is that it comes so close to reminding persons that God is as much Mother as Father. When I reflect on the burnings at the stake and the condemnations of persons from Giordano Bruno to Eckhart to thousands of older women who were dismissed as witches, and also on the genocide against Native American peoples, I wonder if such violence can only be understood by grasping the truth of how the repressed mother in male-dominated Western society and religion is powerful indeed. There lies the dark side to our history.

But the brighter side is upon us as well. With the feminist movement urging us on to recover the traditions of God's motherhood, with creation-centered spirituality replacing fall/redemption models, with the scientist and the artist awakening to mystical awareness, is it not possible that this almost demonically powerful repression is yielding, so that the mother may see the light of day and lead us to a fuller kind of living? One where nurturing and trust, where earthiness and democratic pantheism, where circles instead of ladders arouse images. And where creativity is welcomed, encouraged, nourished, and celebrated in the name of the Creator of all.

The conclusion to be drawn from our being 'enclosed' in the Trinity is not that we are withdrawn narcissistically in a womblike state of bliss and security. Rather, the conclusion Julian of Norwich comes to regarding the motherhood of God focuses on service. 'The mother's service is nearest, readiest, and surest: nearest because it is most natural, readiest because it is most loving, and surest because it is truest.' It includes the pain, risk, and courage that all birthing is about. 'We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death,' she remarks. The service she has in mind is a service of compassion, for motherhood is about 'compassion and grace.' A return to the motherly side of God would be a return to compassion as a way of life. It would also be a return to wisdom as distinct from mere knowledge or information-gathering. Wisdom and compassion; compassion and wisdom: wouldn't such energy revitalize Western religion and civilization, forge new links with non-



The fall/redemption theology. Creation of man. Sistine Chapel.

The creation-centered tradition is feminist. Wisdom and Eros count more than knowledge or control in such a spirituality. Together, feminist women and men are invited to rebirth a religious vision that is more creation-centered. And they can have fun doing it, because play is a grace in such ritual-making and rebirthing.

Western traditions, create gentler and more dialectical relationships to earth, to body, to pleasure, to work, to the artist within and among us? God as mother, Julian insists, is 'all wisdom.'



There can be no question that the creation tradition is the feminist tradition in the West. Feminism of its very nature is prophetic during a patriarchal period of history. Accordingly, feminists have been treated very often the same way as prophets were treated by those in power with power. Consider how many persons on the Family Tree of Creation Spirituality are women or were spiritually educated, as Eckhart was, by women. And consider their fate - how few are known to us, how St. Hildegard is hardly known even by Benedictines; how

Mechtild and Julian of Norwich have been roundly forgotten in our religions, how Eckhart and John the Scot (and Aquinas too) were condemned, for example. Women's religions such as those Starhawk is recovering in her works are deeply pre-patriarchal: they have existed for tens of thousands of years longer than the patriarchal religions that dominate the globe today. Native American spiritualities come from the same period, and it is astounding and uncanny how Hildegard of Bingen's pictures, painted in twelfth-century Germany, are profoundly Native American. What connects the Native American to the twelfth-century German is the ancient creation-centered tradition.

When I read feminist thinkers and poets like Adrienne Rich, Susan Griffin, Rosemary Ruether, Starhawk, Carol Christ, and Beverly Harrison, I find all the themes of creation-centered spirituality that we have treated in this book. In their works, all four paths of the spirituality journey are named and celebrated. I am a spiritual theologian, and there is simply no doubt in my mind or heart that what feminism is doing today is bringing back the creation tradition. The *anawim* are being heard from at last. One hopes it is not too late. And one hopes that the dominant powers in religion and society and in the hearts and minds of persons everywhere will let go of their arrogance enough to listen to this recovery of wisdom in our midst. One hopes that all peoples will welcome the prophets among us. And today, in no small measure these prophets are feminists.



Creation spirituality is a lay spirituality because it cares profoundly about work, which is, after all, what most adults do with their lives. It cares about pleasure and its wise and celebratory possibilities. It cares about sexuality and sensuality. It cares about nature, science, economics, and politics, that is, about people being in the world as agents of transformation.

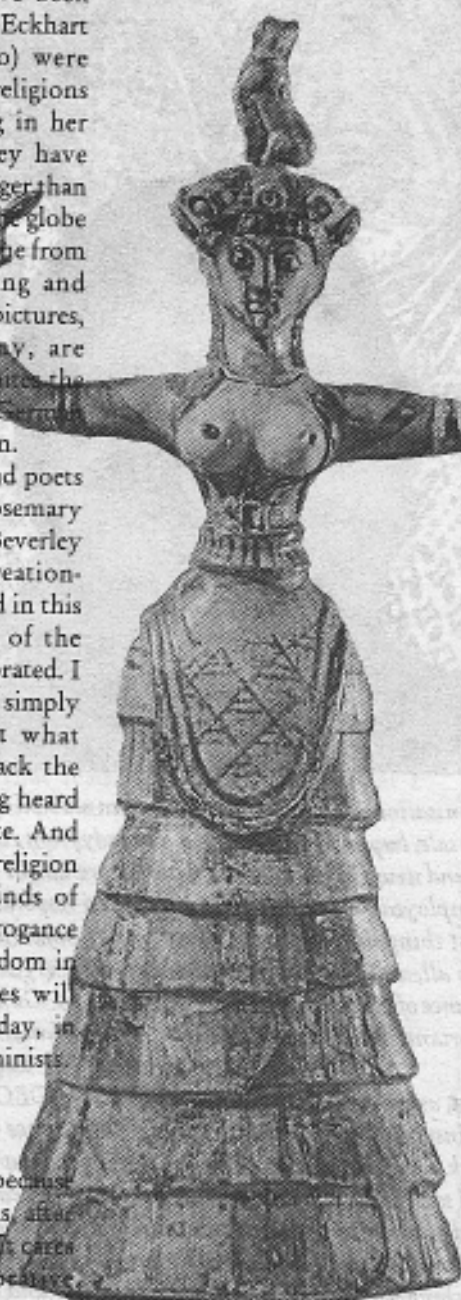
It cares that all of nature and history are sources of revelation.

It is no secret that the models of sanctity that the patriarchal period of Christianity has held up to us have rarely been laypersons. The ideology behind the canonisation of saints has been profoundly oriented towards clerical and fall/redemption theology. One obvious example would be Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*, which was written immediately following Francis' death and which had the desired effect of contributing to his canonisation. It had the undesirable effect, however, of rendering him dualistic, afraid of women and of body, for example. This, in turn, sentimentalized Francis so that much of the hagiography of Francis has failed to make clear the prophetic dimensions to his living. In a considered article on *The Social Function of the Canonisation of Saints*, Pierre Deloof asks some important questions. "What kind of sanctity is wholly

acceptable?... To whom is canonisation useful? Certainly not to the person who has been canonised... Canonisation serves to reinforce the authority of the one who canonises". He demonstrates that while for a thousand years in the church it was the 'ordinary believers' whose role was decisive in canonisation, the process became more and more clericalised until finally only the central hierarchy of Rome held the power. What was the result of this clericalisation? "For some centuries now it has no longer been possible to envisage a canonisation without an accompanying pressure-group, having at its own disposal a supply of specialists, time and capital." It turns out that 'the ideal lobby' is religious congregations. "It is almost impossible for any layman to be able to meet today's conditions or have the money necessary to support such a clericalised process. Deloof concludes that 'The channels of bureaucracy have made it so difficult for a lay person to be canonised that the perception of sanctity has itself been affected. It has become a clerical prerogative to define the very meaning of holiness for us. That is not the creation spirituality way of holiness as cosmic hospitality! I suggest that there is an ideology - a fall/redemption ideology, that cannot deal with the holiness of sexuality, among other things. To correct it, Deloof urges 'a different model of power. If this new model of power appeared, it would bring with it, I suspect, a different model of saint.' Yes, the creation-centered spiritual tradition would surely bring new models of power and of holiness. The *anawim* would be heard from once again as they were in Jesus' and Mary's day.

Matthew Fox holds masters degrees in philosophy and theology and a doctorate in spirituality. He is currently Director of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, which he founded in Chicago in 1978. He has authored twelve books on spirituality and culture.

Figure from the palace of Knossos representing the priestess of the Earth Mother and fertility Goddess. The Serpents are symbols of fertility.



IN CONVERSATION WITH ELA BHATT

— RUKMINI SEKHAR —



Many of us urbanites know SEWA as the organisation that sells exquisite Lucknawi chikan kurtas. We wait for the sale, buy our pieces and go home with nary a thought about the vision and struggle behind each piece of garment. What is SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) and who is behind all this? The first thing that struck me when I went to talk to Ela Bhatt, Ela ben to all, was her quiet calm. No anxious impatience of the doer, no arrogance of the achiever. This woman seemed to know that time was important, but also that quality time was more important.

Ela ben is certainly a part of India's Quest, as she exemplifies one of the finest products of the freedom struggle. Inspired by Gandhi and the idea of nation building she chose to work with the weakest sections of society – women in the unorganised sector. She injected her work with the Gandhian tenets of truth and non-violence and gave a whole new meaning to trade unionism. Struggle and organisation have been the hallmarks of her unflinching work towards giving lower income group women dignity, work security and financial independence. Ela ben's work is practical and down to earth, though deeply fired by her own quest for meaning in her life. She has been

described as an old soul with the wisdom of many lifetimes in her eyes.

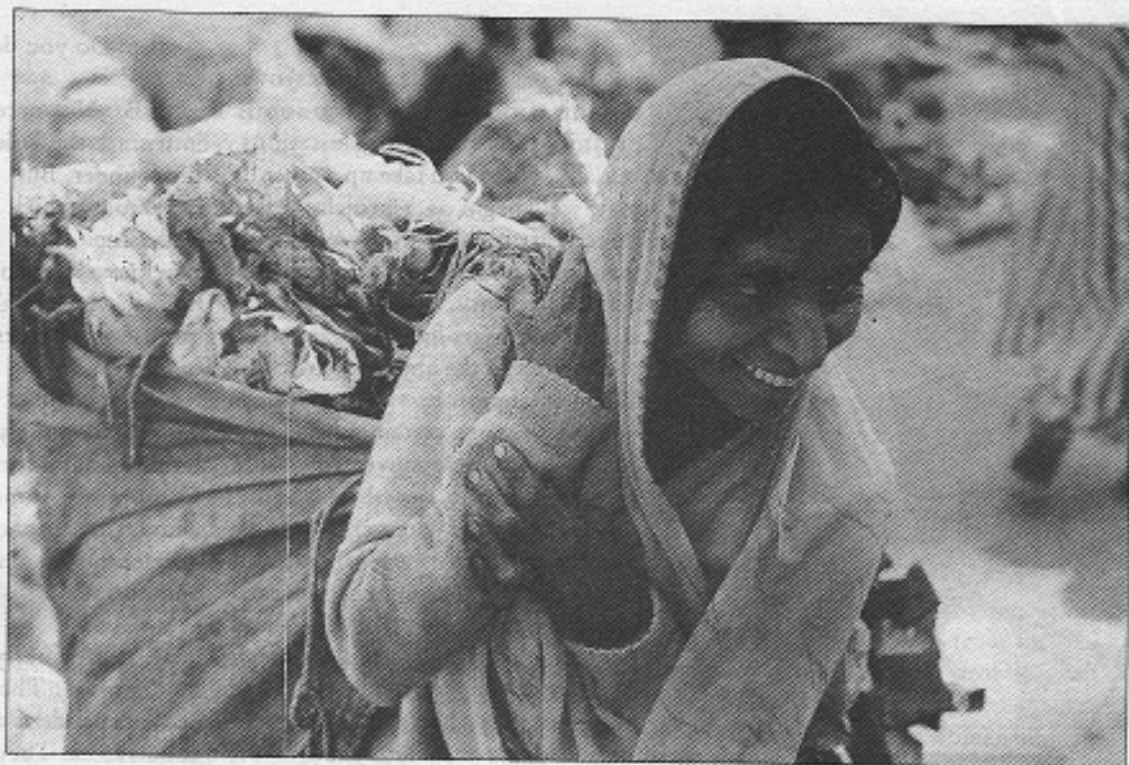
The lady from Ahmedabad has made a dent in international and national arenas. In 1990 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) began to respond to SEWA's demand by initiating an ILO convention for home based workers. She launched the National Centre for Labour (NCL) along with like-minded trade unions. The SEWA sponsored Gujarat Mahila Co-operative Federation got affiliated to the National Co-operative Union of India. Nineteen members of SEWA were represented at the women's conference at Beijing. SEWA VIDEO was given the In the Picture award at the fourth UN Conference on Women. SEWA has nine units in India and has now opened up another unit in South Africa.

Ela ben has opened up a new chapter in the history of women's leadership and entrepreneurship, not by the saccharine mould of charity but by empowerment in very real terms. She is the recipient of the Padma Shri and the Padmabhushan.

'We not only want a piece of the pie, we also want to choose the flavour and know how to make it ourselves'.

Ela Bhatt

What I understand is that the feminist point of view is a pro-woman thinking that leads to equality, but what I understand by empowerment of women is equality of opportunity according to their own capacities.



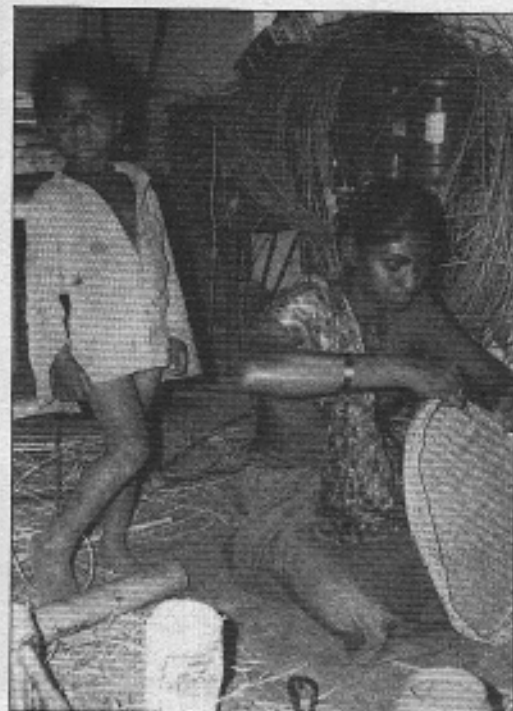
Rukmini Sekhar: *Ela ben*, you have been working towards the empowerment of women for so many years. At this time in history, the feminist movement is also on the upswing. What are your views on 'feminism'? Do you consider yourself a feminist as the term is used today? And does the feminist movement embrace you?

Ela Bhatt: I think empowerment of women is one thing and feminism is another thing. We have to be cautious about these 'isms'. I mean like 'Gandhism' - there's nothing called 'Gandhism'. There is something called Gandhian thinking. So, similarly, feminism becomes a trap because of the 'ism'. What I understand is that the feminist point of view is a pro-woman thinking that leads to equality, but what I understand by empowerment of women is equality of opportunity according to their own capacities. And women are not a homogenous group - they cut across all kinds of class, caste, religion and region. Unfortunately, not enough work is being done by us women and further we don't have a common vision. So, I really doubt that in India we have a common vision from the feminist point of view. What we mean by feminist is to be more 'humanist'. But if you are asking me what my concern is, then it is about the 80% of women of the real India who are rural, poor, illiterate or semi-literate and economically active. So when I talk of the women's movement in India then I'm really not talking of the feminist movement. What are the priorities of our women? They are, work security, income security and self-dignity. They wish to participate in the process of acquiring these and when they

have done so, they have done excellently. This whole process is empowerment, quite different from charity. While struggling for it they get organised, get enough courage to articulate their needs, build up alliances with other sympathetic people and even learn to make policy interventions. I wish to emphasise that the process is what counts though results may take time. Building up self-confidence and fearlessness is part of the understanding. And this understanding is called empowerment. I'm not an expert on the subject, but to me 'feminism' is more like advocacy. Someone taking up another's cause which I don't say is unnecessary. But what I mean by the women's movement is that they themselves take up the objective of getting empowered enough to keep it an ongoing struggle.

R.S: SEWA is one of India's most successful movements or is it an organisation? I am aware that organisation and struggle are the key tenets of your work. Can you elaborate on this please?

E.B: We need to make a distinction between mobilisation and movement. A movement is a larger thing while mobilisation is for something immediate and a somewhat limited purpose. And that is why we find that mobilisation has not been able to turn into a movement. SEWA is a trade union which is both an organisation and a movement. Unionising is not merely confrontation. It also means responsible and constructive action for nation building. Whenever I have seen the success of a movement it is where their organisations have been built up. Poor



peoples' organisations, womens' own organisations, economic organisations, social organisations. Initially, when you take up a cause, it may well begin as a project. After three years perhaps it dawns on you that you could actually 'organise' for better effectivity. Normally, it takes at least ten years for an organisation to take roots if the objectives are clear. While in the process of organising, you are privy to certain aspects that could turn it into a movement. From the movement are born more organisations and vice versa. So they support and enrich each other. From the Gandhian movement emerged many organisations like *khadi* and village industries, political *swadeshi* organisations etc. But those organisations that remain merely organisations and don't turn into movements become dead after some time.

R.S: I myself work in a voluntary organisation, SPIC MACAY, and we like to call it a movement. Now, SEWA has many branches and I presume they are flowering and growing on their own. How do you monitor the character and direction of your various branches? How much freedom and independence do you give to these people - in fact, how much do you interfere in their working?

E.B: Even if our branches do a simple little project it has to have relevance and should be perceived as having one, that's all we ask for. It may be just distribution of milk, but why are we doing that? Everyone involved in that particular activity must know why we are distributing milk to children. It is a matter of perspective and that must be translated into action and goals which are clearly understood by everybody. SEWA's mission may not be lofty, but everybody - members, staff members, volunteers and office holders - all of them understand the same thing. In concrete terms, we believe SEWA's goals are a) full employment at the family level b) self-reliance in decision making and c) financial self-reliance. This everyone understands. This is further broken down to ten questions. The membership may ask the leadership the same questions and vice versa. These questions are constantly monitored, not to see if they are adhered to but whether they are relevant. When the answer is a unanimous yes, then we know that our direction is right. A continuous, ongoing checking of the relevance of our activities is carried out.

R.S: Do you do that regularly?

E.B: Not necessarily, though I'm interested in it since the vision has come from me and I'm the founder. But my colleagues have been with me through thick and thin and I trust them with leadership. And one can be confused at times, you know, I'm not always sure of things as such. So we, who are all in it together, ask the same questions to ourselves. That's how we assess ourselves.

R.S: Suppose your centre in Haryana, UP or Kerala is started and someone takes the initiative. Or suppose someone starts a project. A fair amount of autonomy is needed for a person to develop her vision. But do you give that kind of autonomy?

E.B: Actually, these SEWAs are totally autonomous. They are like our sisters. So they are independent and have their own executive committees. They have their own budgets and own programmes. They are not branches that I sit in Ahmedabad and control and direct them. No, no, no. We have ten SEWAs in six states and all of them are independent. Some are trade unions and some are not. They want an accountability and organisation that is suitable not only to their state but also their temperament. Some are trusts, some societies and yet others, co-operatives. There are, however, few things that have to be common. One is that each centre should concern itself with the working class and necessarily with women from the unorganised sector. The economic development of the community should be at the core. The basic philosophy is that of *sangharsh* and *sangathan* - struggle and organisation. It's not enough to just keep running training classes, one must go out and demand one's rights. To look into all these things we meet every year. We exchange ideas but each centre is independent. Sometimes we take up common issues, like home-based workers and their right to be treated equally like any other worker in the formal sector. We managed to bring the issue to the level of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and nationally too to get a bill passed on home-based workers employment, contribution and regulation bill. On such issues we come together, but at the day-to-day level they are all on their own.

We also come together in the operation of markets. SEWA is in the business of hand-made products and we build up a common market and mutual access to raw materials as well as design. SEWA Lucknow is also dealing with textiles and Ahmedabad is also a textile place. We also help each other in the matter of credit, because SEWA

The membership may ask the leadership the same questions and vice versa. These questions are constantly monitored, not to see if they are adhered to but whether they are relevant. When the answer is a unanimous yes, then we know that our direction is right.



Electoral politics is very very selfish. When the informal sector is not organised they cannot demonstrate their political strength with a common voice and change the balance of power.



Elle Bhett

has a SEWA bank. Over twenty four years the bank has been able to develop a certain expertise through experience.

R.S: Now to another issue altogether. The development pattern in India today follows an established paradigm of globalisation and the market. While the debate on this is endless, I think one cannot deny its exploitative quality especially on poor people. And that is exactly what you are fighting. You may in your life time proceed against it but the process of development itself may not mitigate these miseries of the lower income groups for much time to come. Do you see your own struggle placed in the context only of your lifetime? Is it all worth it?

E.B: It's a very serious problem and is only going to get worse. I mean globalisation is one thing but let's talk of other economic reforms which are privatisation and liberalisation. I'm not against privatisation per se because we, that is the poor of the informal sector and the rural sector also want to get out of the welfare or licence and permit raj. There are so many rules and regulations that curb you all the time and stunt small businesses. We also want bureaucratisation to step down from our shoulders. So, in a way, I'm not against privatisation and liberalisation. But it's a matter of perception. These reforms are not meant only for big businesses and industries. What is true for them is also true for the tiniest businesses. Why have the vendors been cleared off the streets? Look at Calcutta, it's no longer the same! The same cleared up portion is going to be given for car parking! It's a matter of priority. Vendors provide a very useful service to middle class consumers who are an integral component of the 'market'. So, we also need to be private and liberalised. If we get liberalised we will be able to produce more income for our families and the nation. This lack of perception in favour of the 90% of the informal sector have made them victims of the new economic reforms.

In the informal sector, very few are educated if at all. So, whenever they tried to organise themselves, they have got into the clutches of political parties – electoral politics which is very, very selfish. On the other hand, when they are not organised they cannot demonstrate their political strength with a common voice and change the balance of power. When I say 'political' I don't mean electoral politics, but 'political action'. Anybody today

can treat vendors any way they like and the same with home-based workers. Just look at the situation with Harijans, tribals or minorities, can you make one loose remark about them? This is because they have got political visibility. The same should be the case with the informal sector. Only when such marginalised groups become strong can they make full use of the informal sector.

I must say that SEWA has benefitted from these reforms to some extent. Initially SEWA Bank was not given permission to operate in rural areas because we were registered under the Urban Co-operative Bank Act. We had to fight a lot with the Reserve Bank of India for permission. With the new economic reforms it became more easy for us. Now we can even charge our own rates of interest with permission from the RBI.

But we continue to have problems with the 'market'. It does not, in its current avatar allow for fair competition. Our women who pick gum from the forest do not get the 'market rate' they deserve, since they get short changed by the forest officials who then sell it at five times the price in the open market. If the big *vyaparis* and industrialists can use the market to their advantage, why can't the informal sector?

R.S: But this idiom of the open market, it fosters competition. How does your view on this fit in with your Gandhian ideology that spoke of co-operation, trusteeship and common resources?

E.B: It is not contradictory. Again it's a matter of perception. You have raw material. Today, the raw material that is used by the poor is also used by big industries, like bamboo, scrap iron, tendu leaves, yarn and forest produce. Now it is another matter whether the government is concerned about employment or full employment. If employment is part of growth, then they should have policies which create and generate more employment and which also improves the quality of employment. Therefore, the first claim to the raw material is of those who are the actual producers. But sadly, the objective of growth is only economic growth and earning more foreign exchange. And employment growth is not integral to economic growth. Naturally, the big industries get top priority. Take the example of bamboo. We have a forest called Dang in Gujarat. 80 percent of the bamboo has been given away under a contract to some big players. So, those who survived on this raw material called bamboo have only 20 percent to meet all their needs. It is an open market alright, but in a democracy where 60 percent are below the



land. Who gets the priority? Vehicular traffic or those thousands of poor people who make their livelihood on that *do foot ki jagah*? Finally it's perception and priority in a democracy such as ours.

R.S: *Ela ben*, you have been working with women for so long. And you understand them very well. You are aware of the leadership that is emerging from SEWA. Do you see the next century as a century of women leaders, entrepreneurs and achievers?

E.B: I'm not a seer, but I would like to see what you say come true. I do believe that whenever there is social change women are the leaders. This I say with my own experience. Look at the women of Kutch and Banaskantha who are changing the face of the desert. They are even arresting the rura-urban migration from this area. Another example is in banking. I have great faith in the sisterhood of those women who have and those who do not, especially in India. Gandhi said, that in the fight for social justice where the weapons are truth and non-violence women are the natural leaders.

In SEWA we have seen women like Karima Bibi who makes quilt covers from rags for a living. She is a widow. Today, she sits on the negotiating table against her own brother who is a big *vyapari*. There are many like Karima Bibi. Though some SEWA women did not contest panchayat elections they were unanimously invited to the village panchayats. Women are better fighters against the wrath of nature, they are better conservators of natural resources, they are more responsible for the next generation- in general they are more futuristic than men and are better savers. They

really are the natural leaders. Wherever they have been given opportunities for their development they have proven themselves. As I said earlier, what we women lack is a common vision. If we start behaving like men we won't get very far.

R.S: This I believe is true of the common woman who languishes for want of opportunities. But when you put women in real positions of power - prime ministers, chief ministers, corporate heads, they become equally aggressive, aggrandising and corrupt as any one else. And sometimes you feel disappointed by members of your own sex. So, is 'empowerment' your answer, or a 'common ideology' that should govern women?

E.B: Empowerment is only one thing. But to be powerful for what? No, we don't have a common agenda. It is difficult since we are not a homogenous group. The only common things we have are our bodies and motherhood. But if women came to power then what would be our foreign policy? How are we going to allocate our resources? Will there be less rapes? During Benazir Bhutto's regime the rate of rapes by the police increased three times more than normal. What I mean is that we have not sat down and thought of a *woman's* vision of the future.

And the other thing is that we have not taken men into our confidence. Without their co-operation we cannot change the world. They should *participate* in the empowerment of women.

R.S: More a personal question, *Ela ben*, you are dealing with issues very practically - sort of hands on. But is there a deep philosophical motivation that impels you, that makes you look forward to the next day?

A lot of us are devoid of any philosophical moorings. We exist, we don't even live. Some of our younger readers would like to know what charges you.

E.B: The answer is simple. We are a product of those days when the country was fighting for freedom. Then we got the freedom. The atmosphere was charged with patriotism and nationalism and we wanted to build up the nation. Also, my husband was a student leader at that time and so we had the same ideology and spirit. He has always been a great support to me, like a rock. I was thankfully out of all domestic obstacles.

Whenever there is confusion in my mind I look inside of myself for answers. The answer inevitably is, go for whatever cements and binds not for something that divides. The women I work with, those poor women, they give me so



Gandhi said, that in the fight for social justice where the weapons are truth and non-violence women are the natural leaders.

much strength that I hardly feel tired at the end of the day. Now I'm sixty-three and my energy has begun to flag but I know I have worked hard. My level of tolerance is high and I rarely get frustrated or for that matter, excited.

R.S: It seems to be the ideal ingredients that go to make a social worker. Are you quite detached from your work?

E.B: Things don't touch me too much. For a while I get humiliated, hurt. And remember, I was a young woman in a trade union with so many men. You can imagine what I must have gone through. But I had a strong husband who protected me. I have a bad memory so I forget both the good and the bad and I get a good night's sleep. My general health is also OK.

I'm quite selective and don't take up things which are not relevant to SEWA as an organisation. My personal life is also very simple. I don't attend weddings and other ceremonies. I buy my clothes once a year. I have a domestic help who cooks. But all of us wash our own clothes.

R.S: One last thing, *Ela ben*. This interview will come out in the issue of *THE EYE* that is also part of a larger project that is involved with the 50th year of India's independence. You were there when we got it and you have lived to see fifty years of India's nationhood. What does your wisdom tell us on this occasion? Do you have a message that can tide us over the next twenty five years at the least? We have found ourselves catapulted from being a rather laid

back civilisation to a bustling nation. There is much agony and confusion as we go on with our lives.

E.B: I'm not a person to give any kind of message. But I can certainly say, in my simple way, that what we have forgotten is our old *sanskara* of thinking about the other person before yourself. And this, in a broader sense is what is at the root of democracy. Sadly, the middle class that have upheld some sort of moral order, has become so selfish. I think, as I understand it, the role of the middle class was to transform feudal society to a democratic one. And that role has been relinquished by this class. It was the middle class more than the working class who took part in the freedom struggle - who sacrificed, who inspired others. They really should play a role in the transformation of society and to develop democratic values. I don't mean just electing a populist government. I mean, in your family, neighbourhood, public place, school, everywhere. This is good *sanskara*, good *khandaan*, good culture. I remember my mother; whenever these garment dealers came home, she would give them some jaggery and chickpeas. This was the *rituj*, the custom. All these things are gone. At no time in history has there ever been complete equality. But good *sanskara*, yes. Think of others always, that's all I have to say.

Transcribed by Indrani Sen.

Photos: Ela Bhatt - SEWA

Whenever there is confusion in my mind I look inside of myself for answers. The answer inevitably is, go for whatever cements and binds not for something that divides.



As we collected articles for this issue on *Gender*, we came to grips with the fact, that while empowerment of women was the chief agenda of the feminist movement, it was impossible to ignore the several views and perceptions within the movement itself. Many assumed the proportions of a schism which, as 'movements' go, need self-appraisal and resolution. The author here elaborates on one such schism – the gap between what she calls the 'ecofeminists' and 'technofeminists'. She says that while ecofeminism combines the emancipation of women, nature and non-human species and offers an ecological alternative to the patriarchal world view, technofeminism is the feminism of privilege wanting to 'catch up' with men and sharing the patriarchal concept of freedom as independence from and dominance over natural process.

The argument is interesting and very revealing. After fifty years of political independence, and at the threshold of a new millenium, we need to evaluate the impact of dominant categories of 'development' and 'technological progress' from an ecological and feminist perspective.

An ecofeminist perspective combines ecological insights – with women's empowerment. It provides a liberatory framework for all species, not just humans – and by widening the sphere of freedom it widens the potential of feminism. How we relate to other species will determine whether the 3rd millenium is an era of disease and devastation, of exclusion and violence, or a new era based on peace and non-violence, health and well being, inclusiveness and compassion.

The unsustainable outcome is the inevitable result of the deepening of patriarchal domination over women and over ways of knowing and relating non-violently to what has been identified as the 'lesser species'. The second possibility of sustainability can be created by an inclusive feminism, an ecological feminism, in which the freedom of all biodiversity is linked to the liberation of women, in which the tiniest of life-forms is recognised as having intrinsic worth, integrity and autonomy.

Ecofeminism, 'a new term for an ancient wisdom', first used by Francoise D'Eaubonne, grew out of various social movements – the feminist, peace and the ecology movements – in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ecofeminism is the movement and philosophy which combines the emancipation of women and the emancipation of nature and non-human species. It also therefore, frees men from patriarchal structures – structures in which power is experienced as domination over 'women and lesser species', rather than as power to be free of domination – of dominating or being dominated. Ecofeminism as a diversified philosophical framework and world view emerged through action and struggle not in the academy.

Ecofeminism has emerged as a pluralistic, bottom up movement across the world over the past few decades – in the villages of Garhwal when women organised themselves to do Chipko actions, in the homes in Love Canal, where housewives organised themselves to deal



VANDANA SHIVA

WOMEN & NATURE

Ecofeminist Vs Technofeminist Perspectives

with the toxic wastes that had created an epidemic of cancer, in Europe after the Chernobyl disaster, and the Pacific Islands to resist nuclear testing. It is emerging in contemporary India in the coastal regions where women resist industrial aquaculture singing "Rise, daughter of the earth, your mother is being raped". In Gopalpur in Orissa, women have established a little republic to save their local ecology and livelihoods from the threat of a steel plant. "We will die, but will not leave this land". No bureaucrat, no industrialist is allowed to enter after the land was marked for land acquisition for a new steel plant to be built by Tata-Nippon. It is the women who lead the resistance - and their symbol is the *kewra* plant from which essence is made. The struggle in Gopalpur is clearly between a permanent economy of life based on the land and biodiversity, and a short-term economy based on death and destruction.

Therefore, ecofeminism is emerging today as a resistance to globalisation, to trading away of vital resources, to violence and cruelty against animals, as a right to safe and adequate food. Ecofeminism offers an ecological and feminist alternative to the values and instruments of capitalist patriarchy which puts rights of capital above the rights of nature and rights of people, which treats the provision of sustenance as 'unproductive' and rewards destruction and violence as the highest forms of productivity and creativity.

Technofeminism is the feminism of privilege. It has become the preferred philosophy of women in privileged societies and privileged classes. Technofeminism treats women's exclusion from certain privileged activities as the only problem. It does not call into question the nature of those activities or structures, or the values on which they are based or the impact they have on nature, on less privileged women and marginalised people everywhere. Technofeminists share the patriarchal concept of freedom as independence from, and dominance over natural processes.

An unintended convergence has therefore emerged between technofeminists and the highest forms of patriarchal colonisation of nature, the Third World, and ordinary women worldwide, through new technologies and globalisation of the economy. They share with capitalist patriarchy the devaluation of nature, and the devaluation of other ways of knowing.

Even those feminists who identified development as a patriarchal project now refer to globalisation as inevitable, and in fact, liberating for women. Feminists who had analysed the patriarchal roots of modern science and technology see new technologies either as gender neutral or as biased in favour of women.



Ecofeminism as a diversified philosophical framework and world view emerged through action and struggle not in the academy.

As Maria Mies and I wrote in the introduction of our book, *Ecofeminism*:

To 'catch-up' with men in their society, as many women still see as the main goal of the feminist movement, particularly those who promote a policy of equalisation, implies a demand for greater, or equal share of what, in the existing paradigm, men take from nature.

The discussions on gender and technology in western universities and in Indian universities following western fashion has been biased in two ways. Firstly, it has excluded the sciences and technologies of the Third World. Secondly, it has excluded other species. Ecofeminist theorising, emerging from women in the animal rights movement, the environment movement and Third World movements, has been more responsive to taking alternatives into account and reflecting concern for other species. Why has northern academic feminist theorising failed to fully address the wider issue of how humans relate to diverse forms of life and how technology is embedded in ecology and nature?

I think there are two reasons for why the northern academic feminist theorising has been limited, especially in the context of the emerging technology of genetic engineering and patenting of life. First is its dependence on patriarchal reductionism that allows any concrete discussion from another perspective to be labelled as 'essentialism' and does not allow feminist theorising to go beyond the anthropomorphic bias that is the legacy of western patriarchy. The second limitation of academic feminism, especially of the post-modern brand, is that it slips into the hegemonising linearity of history that it critiques in modernism. For us in the Third World, 'modernism' as a hegemonising project of the modern west is no different from 'post-modernism' as the hegemonising project of the post modern west.

A major intellectual move in post-modern feminism that protects northern institutions of power related to technology is by labelling the alternatives of other cultures as 'nostalgia' and 'false sentimentalism'. These are the descriptions patriarchy has always used for devaluing women's knowledge. Patriarchy's preferred adjectives for the knowledge it subjugates have now been picked up by elitist post-modern feminist theorising to put down the knowledge options of other groups of women who are not academics and who carry out the struggle over science and technology not in the domain of texts and words, but in their daily lives, on issues of survival. A common criticism levelled by technofeminists at ecological feminist approaches to the current ecological crisis, is that of 'essentialism'; relating environmental issues to women in a specific way is seen as an 'essentialist' world view. Women's

relate to nature and the environment through the unequal division of labour and unequal division of responsibility for sustenance. They know when springs and wells go dry because it is they who walk longer miles to get drinking water for their families. They know when they are surrounded by toxics because it is they who nurse children dying of cancer. (This was the case both in Love Canal as well as in the famous case against W.R. Grace in Massachusetts). In Bhopal, it is women who have not given up the struggle for environmental justice, and keep reminding the world of the thousands of people killed by Union Carbide.

The convergence between technofeminists and capitalist patriarchy is most evident in the response to genetic engineering, which is capitalist patriarchy's latest project for total control over all life. The ecological challenge compels us to recognise connections and continuity within an organic, evolving, dynamic nature. A feminist response that is ecological must necessarily reactivate a conscious awareness of, and dialogue with nature, lifting it out of its patriarchal definition as something passive and inert - a definition that has also been extended to women.

This separation between the natural and the human world was constructed simultaneously with the separation of mind from matter, and intellect from body. The exclusion of nature from culture and body from mind were used to essentialise gender in such a way that women were treated like nature, devoid of mind and thought, while men were constructed as distinct from the physical world, guided by reason alone and capable of complete intellectual transcendence of the body. How should we respond to these social constructions?

Feminists have challenged the association Nature/Culture: Female/Male in two different approaches.

The first approach maintains the patriarchal construction of 'nature' and 'culture', and to 'separate' woman from 'nature' on the same pattern through which men have 'separated' themselves from 'nature'.

The second approach is to challenge the very construction of 'nature' and 'culture' in the patriarchal vision. This approach recognises that contrary to the patriarchal world view nature has mind and intelligence, and humans too are part of an intelligent, alive and complex nature. Seeing intelligence in nature also implies that intelligence is no longer a monopoly of the patriarchal disembodied mind, and its artifacts.

An example of the first approach of feminist liberation from patriarchal categories is Judith Habermas's *Automating Gender*. Habermas uses the symbol of the cyborg which,



Technology is reduced to a machine, to metal. Nature is reduced to the female body. These were reductions of the patriarchal enterprise.



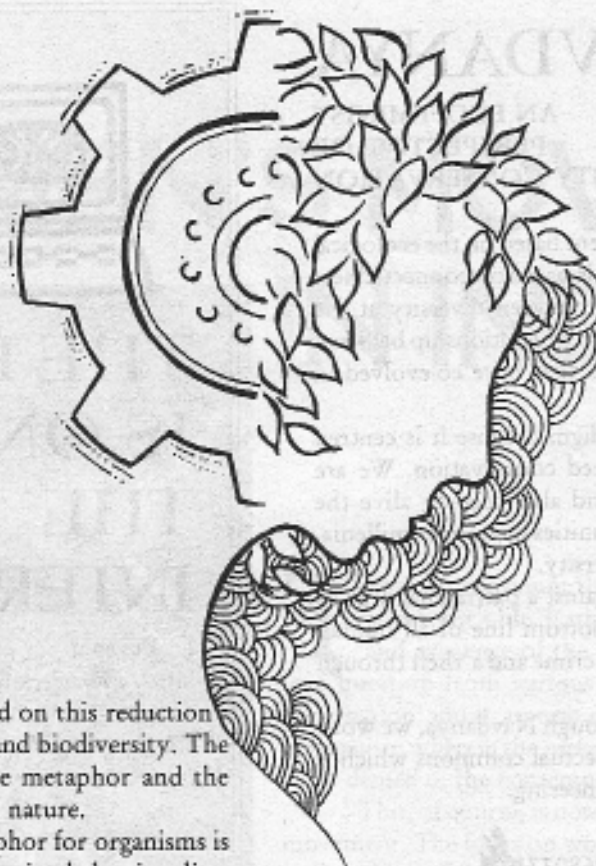
as theorised by Donna Haraway, is a machine both female and intelligent. The cyborg, for Habermas 'severs once and for all the assumed connection between woman and nature upon which the entire patriarchal structures rest'.

From an ecological perspective, I see two problems in the cyborg image of needing to turn to an 'intelligent machine' to reclaim intelligence for women, and to 'sever all connections with nature'. Firstly, such a construction accepts the patriarchal construction of women as having no intelligence and is thus not feminist enough. Further, it implies the racist assumption and colonial consequence of suggesting that the millions of women who labour in fields and forests and rivers in the Third World, producing the material base for the development of such artificial intelligence in other parts of the world, work without their own minds and intelligence. This issue of the recognition of Third World women is at the heart of the debates over 'intellectual property rights'. Patriarchy's definition of innovation only covers the activities of western men, who then 'pirate' the knowledge and innovation of Third World women and claim it as their 'intellectual property'. This is the case for seeds, for medicinal plants, for *neem* and turmeric. Technofeminists thus share with capitalist patriarchy the denial of innovation in the Third World. Universalising the cyborg symbol as relevant to the liberation of all women hides the fact that the 'post-modern' condition for some women is available because of the intelligent labour of the large majority of women. Besides being racially arrogant, this approach also reinforces the ecologically flawed notion of nature and biological organisms as having no intelligence. The ecology of biological organisms takes us away from the mechanistic models of patriarchal science, and allows us to reinvent biology in ways that are both feminist and ecological.

The cyborg metaphor has also been applied by Rosi Braidotti who says, *In the age of biotechnological power motherhood is split open into a variety of possible physiological, cultural and social functions. If this were the best of all possible worlds, one could celebrate the decline of one consensual way of experiencing motherhood as a sign of increased freedom for women.*

What this reading fails to deconstruct in western masculine rationality is a certain notion of technology and nature. Technology is reduced to a machine, to metal. Nature is reduced to the female body. These were reductions of the patriarchal enterprise. By reducing the diversity of technological alternatives to the mechanistic engineering model, and by reducing the diversity of lifeforms to the human, a certain correlation was made between men and technology and

The machine metaphor for organisms is a metaphor arising from patriarchal rationality. When applied to organisms, it takes away the self-organising, self-healing properties of organisms. Organisms that are complete in themselves are turned into raw material.



female' associate was based on this reduction of technological cultures and biodiversity. The machine became both the metaphor and the mechanism for relating to nature.

The machine metaphor for organisms is a metaphor arising from patriarchal rationality. When applied to organisms, it takes away the self-organising, self-healing properties of organisms. Organisms that are complete in themselves are turned into raw material. Technologies that are based on the perception of living organisms as living systems and not as machines are ecological technologies, not engineering technologies (Engineering view of pest control - Ecological view of pest control).

Unfortunately, post-modern feminists have adopted this limited view of technology as mechanisation. They therefore, see an increased degree of freedom not as the freedom of an organism to adapt, to grow, to give shape from within but as the mechanistic addition of 'metal' to 'flesh', and the 'machine' to the 'body'. Haraway's cyborg imagery was supposed to suggest a way out of the maze of the dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. However, more often in cyberpunk fiction, the possibilities of cyborg existence seem reduced to a radical devaluation of organic bodies, usually referred to as 'the meat'.

Another charge of essentialism comes from those who see difference as so 'essential' that it makes solidarity and commonality impossible. This again is based on the patriarchal paradigm of 'sameness'; if people, things, organisms are different, then the assumption is that they can have no relationship and no overlap. This leads to a solipsism that

interprets relating and connecting as sameness and the argument that the search for a common ground for women's actions and concerns is essentialising the category 'woman'. There is, however, no essentialism involved in partnerships, in solidarity, in symbiosis. Women acting together in spite of their diversity, is not equivalent to the essentialising of woman as a uniform category. Yet another common criticism of reconnecting with nature is that it involves a return to the past. This criticism arises from externalising nature in space and time; connections then imply a 'return' to another time, another place. If, however, our perceptions are ecological, then nature is the complex web of processes and relationships that provide the conditions for life. In this view, nature is not external, and it is not spatially and temporally separated from our being. Essential ecological processes that maintain life cannot be treated as part of the world-view of technological obsolescence. The moment we accept conditions for life as obsolete aspects of a primitive past, we invite death and destruction. In fact, it is this chrono-colonisation, or temporal colonisation, of living processes based on false and artificial constructions of 'traditional', 'modern', as if they are in a linear temporal hierarchy of the past, the present and the future, which underlie the subjugation of nature and women. The separation of the conditions of life from ourselves and our

economic and scientific activity, and the location of these conditions in the past, are a major cause of the ecological destruction of ecosystems and of our bodies. Technofeminists, like Descartes, want to escape from the body. However, it is patriarchal structures from which we need to escape not from our organic body. In fact it is the 'escape' from the bodily limits of cows as herbivores that is responsible for the Mad Cow epidemic, it is an 'escape' from rejecting the Flavr-Savr tomato (which does not rot) and which failed because of consumer rejection.

Ecofeminism is a reminder that human freedom cannot be limitlessly built on the subjugation of nature and her diverse species. It is a philosophy that recognises the subjecthood not just of men, but women too, and not just of humans, but also other species and the earth. This larger democracy of all life is also contained in the ancient hymn of the *Ishopanishad* which states,

The universe is the creation of the Supreme Power meant for the benefit of (all) creation.

Each individual life form must, therefore, learn to enjoy its benefits by forming a part of the system in close relation with other species. Let not any one species encroach upon others rights.

Vandana Shiva is the author of the much acclaimed Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development. Physicist, philosopher, feminist and author of many books, she is Director of the Research Foundation for Science and Technology and Natural Resource Policy, Dehradun. Her's is one of the most strident international voices in defence of Third World environmental rights. Her consistent work in this area has earned her the Right Livelihood Award and several others. Vandana is our scholar/consultant for the Environment/Technology/Livelihood theme in INDIA'S QUEST.

Illustrations: Rustam Vania



NAVDANYA

AN ECOFEMINIST
PERSPECTIVE OF
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Navdanya is a biodiversity conservation movement based on the ecological and feminist paradigm. It is ecological because it is based on connectedness rather than fragmentation, it is based on links between diversity at the cultural and biological level, it is based on the intimate relationship between diversity of ecosystems and the seeds and crops that have co-evolved in them.

Navdanya is based on the feminist paradigm because it is centred on women's knowledge of biodiversity and seed conservation. We are committed to keeping this knowledge alive, and also keeping alive the ethics of sharing, through which farming communities have, over millennia, protected and evolved their agricultural biodiversity.

Navdanya is a movement of resistance against a patriarchal urge to own and control all life, to make profits the bottom line of all human interactions making free sharing among peoples a crime and a theft through 'intellectual property rights'.

With an ecological and feminist vision through Navdanya, we work towards the recovery of the biological and intellectual commons which is being enclosed through patents and genetic engineering.

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HELLO DOLLY

Ron James from Edinburgh has cloned a sheep called 'Dolly'. He had earlier engineered 'Tracy' a sheep with human genes in it to produce pharmaceuticals. Tracy was patented as a 'mammalian bioreactor'. A 'mammalian bioreactor' is literally a machine that produces chemicals through the mammary glands. Women would also be covered by this definition.

Patents have also been taken for the blood in the umbilical cord to be used in organ transplants and for the hormone 'relaxin' which allows contractions during childbirth for use in the reproductive engineering industry (test tube babies).



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THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

A
HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE

INDU AGNIHOTRI



IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS: MANUJHI

The need to recount this arose not out of a desire to narrate anecdotes from an activist's life. Rather, it needs to be put on record that the very identity and existence of the women's movement in India continues to be called into question from various quarters. The reasons for this lie in both lack of information about aspects of the movement, as well as an ideological defense mechanism wherein the *raison d'être* of the struggle for women's equality continues to be denied in the contemporary Indian mindset.

This, of course, is not the only critique forthcoming of the Indian women's movement. The focus on women in the course of the UN Decade For Women, as well as some of the more well-publicised protests around the issues of dowry and rape etc. in India, attracted the attention of western scholars. Many of these subsequently analysed the Indian movement. Two points highlighted in the course of western feminist writing on India in this period were (a) that India had seen no women's movement prior to the 1970s and (b) that even if it could be established that women had been active participants in the struggle for change, there was a significant difference between the old types of movements and the new women's movement, which focuses on gender-based oppression, as specific to women.

Thus the Indian women's movement is called upon to stand up and defend itself from critiques coming on several counts. At the same time it also has to retrieve its own history, both in the context of the past as well as the present. In the last fortnight alone this writer had the opportunity to hear at least two Vice-Chancellors recount how women in India had been and continue to be the object of worship with the rider that of course things had changed of late and how, really, women ought not to be treated so badly.

An Unrecorded History

There are of course, several critics who argue from within the framework of visibly shared goals. These are led by feminists and academic scholars alike, who maintain that the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle did not pay sufficient attention to the woman question. In fact it has even been argued by some scholars, that the woman question was subsumed in the course of the nationalist struggle in India.

The true picture, needless to say, would have to be reconstructed from within the mounds of written history, oral testimonies, private memoirs and even the spectrum of social memory. No doubt, that with the passing away of the age of history being only the art of recording political chronology, immense possibilities have opened up for the writing of a social history where women's agency too figures with some sensitivity. The expanding horizons of history today represent an open field where the processes of change can be captured in all their richness and complexity along with a record of the lives of men and women who contributed to these. The strength of those wanting to write history with a view

With only four years to go for the great leap forward into the twenty-first century, it is surprising that the Women's Movement in India is still besieged with questions about its very existence. Recently, at a conference in Lucknow, a senior academic sought to apply the litmus test. Is there a women's movement at all, and if there is one, does it have an ideology, a leadership, a mass base and an organisation? It fell upon this writer, amongst others, to answer this question and to add that not only is there a movement, but that the components which were being listed as essentials were available in abundance, and that the movement has had a rich history as well.

from below, has certainly made it possible to peel off layers of the dominant, hegemonic consciousness so as to make way for uncovering the experience and ideas of non-hegemonic groups, including women as well as far more 'engendered' history writing.

It is not possible to recount the main features of the history of even the last hundred years in the space available. Nevertheless, if one looks at available secondary material alone, there is enough to suggest that women's contribution to social movements in India forms a substantial part of our recent history.

Contrary to popular perceptions that Indian women did not have to struggle to get their rights, women figured and featured at several levels in the wide range of strategies adopted by Indians in the long-drawn struggle against imperialism. There were petitions galore, on issues ranging from the right to representation, on the vote, on eligibility clauses attached to the regulations which evolved out of the various reform acts; continuing this stream of visibly expanding the form and extent of political representation – both under colonial rule and in independent India – women used various legislative fora and independent associations to extend their rights. Further, at several points of time, when rights were finally won, these bodies were used, as they continue to be today, to extend the constitutional/legal rights for women. The interventions made on the issue of property rights for women as well as in the arena of the rights within marriage and the family, both before the B.N. Rau Committee in the 1940s and at the time of the debate on the Hindu Code Bill were notable. It needs to be pointed out here that contrary to misconceptions that these issues concerned only some upper class women, the nature of enactments on all these counts had far-reaching implications for large sections of women cutting across caste and community lines.

At the same time there was activity at other levels. Aspects related to women's work, including specifically as wage labourers figured in the course of workers' struggles in different parts of India. At the beginning of the century women formed a significant component of the workforce in the industries, notably textile and coir. They were also active participants in the struggle led by their



The Indian Women's Deputation to Montagu and Chelmsford, 1917, demanding the vote for women: Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Srimati Jinarajadasa, Margaret Cousins, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Hirabai Tata, Dr. Joshi and others.

No doubt that with the passing away of the age of history being only the art of recording political chronology, immense possibilities have opened up for the writing of a social history where women's agency too figures with some sensitivity.



Lakshmi Menon (centre), Deputy Minister of External Affairs, seen with Judge Kenyon and Mrs. Tassilian at the UN where she was elected Chief of the UN section on the Status of Women.

unions, and often articulated demands in their dual capacities, as women and as workers. It was no coincidence that the names of union leaders such as Parvati Krishnan, or Aruna Asaf Ali, for some time at least, became synonymous with the union-led struggle of railway and textile workers. While it may be argued that the front rank of women leaders in all these spheres were drawn from fairly elite backgrounds it nevertheless must be noted that be it Madam Bhikhaji Cama, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Kalpana Dutt or any of the other names that figure in the long list of women activities – they all had to contend

with tremendous social hostility and their lives represent a long history of struggle at the individual level to establish a different kind of identity for women in the face of intense pressures to adhere to stereotypical images and social codes of behaviour. At an oral history workshop organised by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library some years ago, presentations made by women who had been active as early as in the 1940s, pointed out that while present day activists saw the older women as pioneers, they themselves had found role models in their own fore-mothers, many of whom had questioned existing social mores and whose lives were closely inter-woven with India's quest for a new identity. The contributions of Pandita Ramabai, Anandi Ganesh, Savitribai Phule and numerous others is only now getting recognition through more gender sensitive research.

The intensity of conflict was, in fact, even more marked when gender oppression combined with caste and class-based exploitation, as happened in the series of struggle revolving around the issue of land and tenancy rights. The mass-based agrarian struggle that swept the Indian countryside in the first half of the century highlighted several aspects all at once. On the one hand the tremendous involvement of women in these struggles points to the integral link drawn in their minds about their identity as peasants or rural labour with their specific identity as women. The link between sexual violence heaped on women in situations arising out of their specific location as women born into dalit families enhanced their vulnerability and compounded their experience of being exploited. Attempts to

in a fragmented form would not only lessen the intense sense of brutality, it would also weaken the attempt to conceptually capture the multi-layered oppression that women face. More than the written records of the history of movements such as the Punapra-Vayalar, Tebhaga, Telangana, and the Worli struggles, or the agrarian struggles waged in north India under several banners, women activists in contemporary times have picked up songs that were composed in the midst of all these movements; these tell the story of the power wielded by the landlord and his henchmen, the damage done to the harvest which was both a financial loss as well as the loss of labour, the havoc wrought on entire families, and on women themselves. But above all they convey the deep desire to live a life of dignity in peace and well being. These songs represent the urge for creative endeavour despite a brutalized existence and the desire to preserve all that is good and human. There is enough evidence to suggest that this desire to a life with dignity which at once encapsulates the struggle for equality and democracy is very much a women's concern, a proposition that needs to be examined seriously in view of the fact that efforts are still on-going to define women's issues in very narrow, de-contextualised terms.

This is not to undermine the tremendous significance of even the 'narrowly' defined sphere of the battle against perceived 'social evils', such as the practices of *sati*, child marriage, widow remarriage, female infanticide and for the right to education as highlighted by the 19th century reformers, men and women. As women's writing conveys, the pain and sense of suffocation born out of barriers imposed by society and the violence heaped on them in the name of upholding 'honour', be it of a nation, or community or even the family, is no less brutal or devastating. Rebellion against imposed social codes has long formed a part of women's history and one does not have to be an activist to experience the sense of discrimination that the girl child in India is faced with. In fact the strength of the women's movement lies precisely in the fact that the goal of equality is and has been internalised by a vast mass of women outside the ambit of its 'organised' strength. This solidarity born out of a commonality of gender based oppression is what adds an element of essentialism to the argument, even as the multiple forms of oppression question the impression of homogeneity.

It is due to this seeming paradox that the question continues to be posed as to what really are women's issues? That this is not an academic question alone was illustrated by the editor of a Marathi women's magazine at a workshop some

years ago as the tide of fundamentalist communalist violence swept across the sub-continent, articles appeared by women expressing concern at these happenings and what implications these had for their lives. But there were many, including from the management who asked her – but what does communalism have to do with women?

In other words what is sought to be imposed on the movement is a thoroughly decontextualised frame within which the linkages of women's oppression with the wider social processes are obliterated.

DEFINING THE CONTEXT

In the context we need to examine the paradigm shift in the latter half of this century. On the one hand the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle fought in the first half continues to be at the receiving end of a 'critique' for not having paid sufficient attention to the woman question. On the other hand, as argued earlier, it can be established that issues of women's rights and the impact of socio-political processes on women's lives formed a part of the consciousness of the earlier period; this is in marked contrast with the present context where the debate on women's rights is often posed outside of the context and is at the same time not seen as a matter of concern at a wider level.

If one were to review a large part of

As women's writing conveys, the pain and sense of suffocation born out of barriers imposed by society and the violence heaped on them in the name of upholding 'honour', be it of a nation, or community or even the family, is no less brutal or devastating.



Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay discussing problems at a co-operative farm of the Indian Co-operative Union, of which she was President.

writing on women, it emerges that issues of violence, particularly violence against the female body are seen as women's concern. Consequently, we have many tracts, comprising of reports and analytical pieces which record some of the horrific detail of crimes against women. These focus around dowry, rape, child

It would appear then that there is legitimacy and sanction to raise issues which pertain to gross abuse, sexual or otherwise, in the name of women's rights. To turn the argument around, this would mean that divorced from the need for the quest for equality and justice, evidence of excessive abuse is justifiably seen as calling for action to rectify the damage done. This would assume that the social conscience is aroused by very blatant violation, i.e. physical violation of the human or female body; but that is still not a sufficient argument in favour of a prolonged struggle for equality in public perception.

This is visible in everyday parlance when the argument is advanced that while women must get justice (read seek an end to gross abuse), they must not give the go by to their real role in life, i.e. that of mother, wife or daughter, or a 'carer'.

In other words there is a perceived threat lest the rhetoric of rights and equality, be carried 'too far' for that will put into jeopardy the very mainstay of Indian society, i.e. the unit and structure of the family.

Without going into a debate on the diverse forms of family structure that exist in India or even hazarding too many statistical meanderings, if one only looked at two social indices we get a zoom lens into what goes on in our society.

1. Every third reported incident of rape in the capital city of Delhi in 1995 was that of a minor girl below the age of seven.

2. There are at least 13 States/Union Territories in India whose sex ratio falls far below the national figures for sex ratio and within this, the juvenile sex ratios gives cause for further alarm.

Even by the proclaimed standard of gross abuse both these observations ought to make policy-makers as well as 'concerned' citizens sit up. However the necessary reactions have not been forthcoming. Leave alone the need to sit up and examine the deeper

social processes which result in this situation, one finds that even by the stated norm of public revulsion at blatant abuse, public response is far short of what the situation calls for.

On the contrary, responses to protests by women's organisations border on the cynical and the dismissive, as if women have become prone to crying wolf and are misguided enough to protest at the drop of a hat.

Is this not a retreat from the situation in nineteenth century India when public conscience was revolted by the incidence of *sati*, the plight of widows, denial of education, child marriage and so on?

Contrary to the position that the women question was 'subsumed' by the national question, one could perhaps argue the other way round to say that in fact, the ferment rocking Indian society under colonial tutelage, opened up a host of issues. It was the nation's and society's search for equality, justice and democracy which provided the framework within which the gender based aspects of inequality too came up for scrutiny along with other facets of social inequality.

No doubt the debate would be inconclusive. For many would draw attention to the paternalism and the element of patronage inherent in the social reformer's zeal for reform. And they would be right in doing so. But compare the 19th century zeal for reform with the 'liberalisation - privatisation - globalisation' (LPG) era and aura pervading Indian society today, (I must confess I picked this up from another academic at a conference recently) aptly reflected in the colour page supplements of daily newspapers. It would appear that the guiding principle of the USP (Unique Selling Point) strategy is to showcase the woman as 'a commodity', herself to be consumed.

The paradigm shift that thereby becomes visible represents a situation wherein, even though there is today a vibrant, dynamic and diverse movement for women's advance at the social level, the wider response to it is yet to acknowledge and accept that there is even a justification or basis for it, leave alone recognise that society has a responsibility to rectify the situation.



From top:
Pandita Ramabai
Lakshmi Bai Tilak
Parvati Bai Athavale



IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS: MANUSHI

Women working in a factory. Participating in the nation building process.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The identification of the basis of women's oppression in the multiple layers of their social existence has a bearing on the strategies for empowerment. For an isolationist and fragmented construct of women's oppression would work in the direction of strategies which too draw on fragmented vision. Taking the example of violence, it can be argued and shown that very often even the sexual violence that women undergo has its roots in other domains of social conflict. In recent years struggles around the issue of rights in common land have often led to the rape of women. Consider the numerous examples of sexual violence that women have encountered in political movements. Sexual violence

has been used as an instrument of curbing political dissidence. Can this violence be fought from an exclusionist perspective? Would fragmented analysis allow for us even to get to the root of the problem, leave alone begin the process of rectification.

The same responses are encountered when women in the movement question the process of development which has led to increased marginalisation. In government's response to the reality of this marginalisation there is often an un-stated assumption that temporarily women too have to pay the price, along with other oppressed groups, for the goal of modernisation. However, there is enough evidence to show that downward filtration of resources as prosperity increases is a mirage. Analysis of available data even for affluent, first world countries proves that affluence only increases the difference in resources at the command of different social groups. In other words existing divisions based on race, caste, class or gender get further entrenched rather than reversed.

The on-going debate on reservation for women around the 81st amendment, needs to be examined in this context. Few women suffer from the myopic vision that reservation will end discrimination against women. Rather, the argument in favour of the amendment is based on the understanding that participation at various

levels of decision-making, and the very act of walking out of the confines of the home will open up avenues which have till now been closed to women. Undoubtedly processes unleashed even in the last few years since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th amendments giving one-third representation to women in local bodies have upset the apple-cart. This is not to say that the power nexus which ensures that assets and resources in rural or urban India remain with the chosen few has been broken. That a dent has been made somewhere is obvious from the reaction against the unleashing of this process and the unprecedented unity in established power groups against the proposed 81st amendment.

The dilemma is not entirely an 'external' response to the movement. Questions and doubts have from time to time been posed by women themselves.

At the start of the decade of the eighties, for e.g. there was much talk of keeping politics out of the movement, since politics would divide the movement. Thus, there was an attempt to project a notion of an all women's unity which would be shattered if ideological issues crept in.

The question of what comprises politics and can a movement for democratic rights and equality be non-political at all is another issue. As of today, it would appear that the dictum that history shall provide the answer serves to set the mind at rest. For, as it has shaped up, the debate on reservation for women in decision making bodies brought together a wide range of activists who have learnt from experience that for Sita's daughters, the very stepping out beyond the *lakshman rekha* of the four walls of the house represents a significant step towards breaking the barriers of seclusion. With one stroke, the debate on whether women should participate in politics and whether the movement is a political one has been carried to another plane.

Meanwhile, many in the movement and those viewing it from the outside continue to be distracted by the 'divisions'. From the beginning there have been different streams within the women's movement, both in India and abroad. Differences in perspective are in a sense also a reflection of the broader social divisions. The fact remains that women's gendered existence gives rise to a commonality born out of the experience of specific forms of oppression and discrimination.

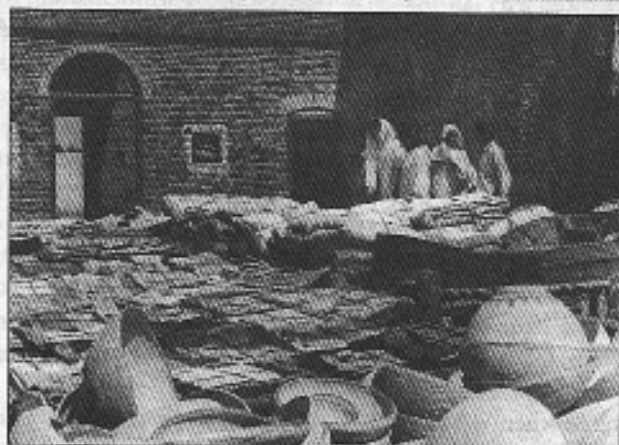
At the same time, the fact of the multiple identities that they carry, as members of a specific class, community or social group, calls for a need to both integrate their experience in these spheres with other aspects of their social existence. These together shape their consciousness at the wider plane within the dominant discourse of citizenship.

The strength of the Indian women's

Responses to protests by women's organisations border on the cynical and the dismissive, as if women have become prone to crying wolf and are misguided enough to protest at the drop of a hat.

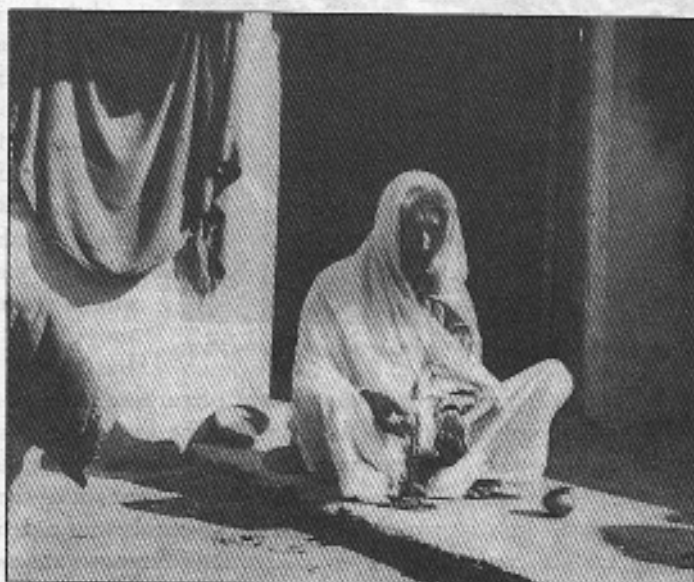
movement lies in the fact that through its multi-pronged approach at the level of strategies it has at least succeeded in identifying that the problem is one of interrogating women's existence through these multiple layers. Much though some had hoped, the domain of women's activity has stretched beyond the prescribed norm, defying the public-private divide by sheer intervention at different levels in an ever-expanding terrain. This very interrogation of society in these very diverse domains has been an assertion of a kind; a statement to the effect that women's concerns extend beyond the inter-personal. Many have observed that the women's movement has attempted a new kind of praxis, which is itself a statement of perspective. Much in the tradition of the Indian left, the movement has advanced the tenets of liberal democracy, to intermesh them with a more gendered perspective in its search for equality to arrive at a historical point where the premise itself is a kind of theoretical statement. It is this which has given the Indian women's movement an identity of its own. Meanwhile activists continue to parry questions posed to them in everyday life about their very *raison d'être*.

Indu Agnibotri is a well known activist in the women's movement. She is a Senior fellow at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.



Family members inspect the dowry display of a daughter in the courtyard of a large brick hugar. (1955)

SITA'S DAUGHTERS. LEIGH MINTURN



A widow with shorn hair and a white, borderless sari, uses a string of prayer beads and a brass pot of water in her personal worship service. (1955)

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SAROJINI NAIDU SELECTED LETTERS 1890s-1940s

It seems eminently appropriate to bring in a woman like Sarojini Naidu into our discourse on gender. Given that this is our fiftieth year of independence, we wish to once again reinstate her memory within our pages. As luck would have it, Kali for Women had just published a selection of her letters most painstakingly and carefully selected and edited by Makarand Paranjape. It is obvious from the way that it is done that he himself was deeply inspired by her. These letters proved to be so much better than any biography of her; so we were delighted that Kali permitted us to use these extracts from their book. All those sections within quotes are either Makarand's words or excerpts from Sarojini's letters.



Sarjini Naidu: *Selected Letters 1890s to 1940s* is the first compilation and publication of the letters of this outstanding woman of the twentieth century. 'These letters not only record, describe, analyse and comment on some of the important events and personalities of Sarojini's time, but provide insights into her own life in several of its most fascinating facets. Here we get a glimpse of the various roles she played: daughter, lover, poet, wife, mother, friend, disciple, national leader, cultural ambassador, governor of India's largest state and so on.' Then again, Sarojini Naidu's letters address the predicament of women even today – how to perform these multiple and equally demanding roles with a degree of success?

'Sarojini Naidu was perhaps the most prominent woman among the leaders of the mass movement which fought for the independence of India. As a nationalist leader, poet, activist for women's rights and celebrity, she was certainly one of the most memorable and colourful Indian women in this century.' These letters weave a narrative which contains traces of her ideas on citizenship, manhood the responsibilities of womanhood, and the duties of a man towards his wife. A multi-dimensional life lived in the limelight, Sarojini Naidu proves once again that it is possible for women to play out various roles successfully. These various seemingly discordant facets of a personality can not only co-exist and this co-existence need not be to the detriment of another facet.

In his *Introduction* to the volume, Makarand Paranjape writes, 'Sarojini began to stay away from home for long periods when her children were still young. The letters show her anxiety to perform her role of a mother as conscientiously and diligently as possible, even if they were letters written from a great distance.' Her concern ranges from their handwriting 'You are too old now to write so badly and I shall be very grieved if you do not begin to set your mind to your studies from now' –

to their health. She worries about Randheera's health and their loss of spirit when Randheera fails to gain admission to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. She addresses him as 'My darling distressed son'; she goes on to write 'You cannot think how anxious I am about your bodily health and with tender yearning my heart goes out to you. I know you are going through a difficult ordeal but I am confident that my son will come out of it strong, chastened and brave.' At the same time she rejoices in the success of her children – to Leilamani she writes 'my brilliant little baby: How proud I am of your success. To commemorate your victory I must send you something beautiful.'

Her letters to her children also are the working ground for thinking through ideas on citizenship. In her letter to Jaisoorya on the occasion of his fourteenth birthday we get a sense of her conception of manhood. 'It seems almost incredible to me that in a few days you will be 14 years old, no longer a little child, but one standing on the threshold of manhood, ready to be a friend and comrade to your father and mother; ready to begin your preparation for the larger, fuller life as a serious student and a serious worker in the future, which I hope you realize in your mind. When you were born, I consecrated your young life to India; and as you grow towards your manhood you must fulfil these responsible pledges I gave in your name. The whole of your energies must be centred in serving India and you cannot bring to that privileged service anything but your best possibilities, physical, mental, and moral, widened through knowledge, a strong clean body and a character without fear and without stain on it of anything weak and ignoble. These are the gifts that I want you to bring to the work to which you and I are both pledged and dedicated for the next few years. Remember you are building up these qualities; these are the years of your training, your apprenticeship; and all depends upon yourself whether you are going to fulfil all the hopes that father and I have for your future. You must make your character strong. You must be manly in every fibre of you, strong and true and wise. These are the characteristics of a fine manhood. Learn to overcome your faults, learn to look at life straight, speak straight, and act straight in every circumstance however difficult. Let your body and mind and soul grow together in perfect triple alliance; feed all these, and keep all these in good training.' She propounds on this theme further in yet another letter to Jaisoorya 'you are growing up now, dear, and it will not always be very easy for you to stop and think of what is right or wise,

because you are so impulsive; but that is exactly what I want you to try and train yourself to do – to think before you act or speak and never to be led away by your companions in a moment of excitement. To be weak is really in the end to be wicked. The world today has no place for weak men – and India especially wants her sons to be strong for the right, strong in body, strong in courage, strong in wisdom and judgement. You must cultivate above all things a sense of justice which is the rarest thing in the world – you must not let your young heart grow bitter or full of resentment or wrong judgement through what other people say about individuals or races or governments and creeds. You may be a little too young to quite understand all this at once, but you will in a year or two.... I am very anxious to impress this on you. If you wish to do any fine work later for the country, you must keep your spirit quite free from prejudices and false patriotism which can never result in any good and very often ends in waste of life and valuable energies.... But remember that true power does not fritter itself away in vain talk – it conserves itself, prepares itself, equips itself with necessary knowledge and authority for the moment when it can best realize itself for the good of the country and the world in general.' To Leilamani, she writes about the responsibility of being a woman in a man's world. Her understanding of responsibilities is contextualised in the broader conceptual framework of the relationship between duties and freedom. 'Only remember that you are an Indian girl and that puts upon you a heavier burden than if you were an English girl born to a heritage of freedom. Remember that you have to help India to be free and the children of tomorrow to be free-born citizens of a free land and therefore – if you are true to your country's need you must recognize the responsibility of your Indian womanhood. Nothing in your speech or action should cause the progress of Indian womanhood to suffer, nothing in yourself should give room for wretched reactionary slave-minds to say "This comes of giving too much education and freedom to our women.".... You are not free – one is – in the sense of being a law unto yourself in defiance of all existing tradition in our country – for freedom is the heaviest bondage in one sense – since it entails duties, responsibilities and opportunities from which slaves are immune.... Noblesse oblige! and the ampler the liberty the narrower the right to do as one pleases.'

Being a mother is only one of the roles that Sarojini played in her lifetime. As a national leader she was, though not at the forefront, quietly working in the background. Sarojini was active in the Dandi March and the Salt Satyagraha, 'the very core and centre of all

Remember that you have to help India to be free and the children of tomorrow to be free-born citizens of a free land and therefore – if you are true to your country's need you must recognize the responsibility of your Indian womanhood.

We are all lonely pilgrims seeking, seeking, seeking with passionate longing for the truth that lies beyond the experience of one soul never can help or enlighten another.

[Sarojini's] public labour has been Hindu-Muslim unity.' A great supporter of Gandhi, Sarojini could not always comprehend the curious ways of 'the little man'; this volume of letters reveal a very interesting relationship between 'the wandering singer' Sarojini and 'the Spinner-Stay-at-Home' – Gandhi. She looks to him for inputs in her political work 'first of all there is my letter to the Secretary of State in reply to the Govt. of India's telegram to him regarding my charges about the ill-treatment of women during the period of the martial law in Punjab. What an unworthy document and how unconvincing to any sane or sincere mind! I send you also my letter to the member of the Khilafat delegation, who left yesterday – and my letter to the Viceroy which they have taken back with them together with my Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal which was bestowed on me long ago – in King Edward's time.' Gandhi is most definitely her guru; she writes to him on her birthday 'I have stolen one moment ... to send you a little message across the seas, of my love, my homage, and my utter devotion to the beautiful gospel you have given to the world for deliverance, and which is my privilege to bear literally to the ends of the world.' She is his 'friend and follower'. Though she never stops supporting Gandhi because in ways she understands him, she is sometimes exasperated by his ways 'To plead with you against your personal decisions is worse than useless, I know, but you cannot prevent me from entering into a passionate protest at your once again taking upon yourself the sins of those around you – it is only the personal and not the vicarious repentance of a man that brings his redemption and pardon – that is sound Hindu religion and sound common sense, and you only put a premium upon evil when the evil can escape so easily by the suffering of saints with too much compassion. However, though my brain emphatically disapproves of your action and my heart rebels with anxiety, my soul does comprehend the significance and symbol of your self-imposed penance.' Her exasperation is revealed on yet another occasion, this time in a letter to her daughters – 'The Little Man continues to be most obdurate and unreasonable.... Meanwhile he [Gandhi] has to be kept as quiet and calm as possible.... Besides he has so cheapened the meaning and value of his fasts that people are not deeply moved at this juncture.... his faith must carry him through....'

Though Hindu-Muslim relations form the core of her political interest she has an interesting line of discussion with Gokhale; one of these deals with the need for good leadership. 'Oh, we want a new breed of men before India can be cleansed of her disease. We want deeper sincerity of motive, a greater courage in speech and



Sarojini Naidu and others during the Salt Satyagraha

The letters offer us a vivid portrait of Sarojini and her multi-faceted personality. They reveal a woman who had a disease-prone body but an indomitable spirit, who could withstand great pain and suffering and yet come out unscarred.

want men who love this country and are full of yearning to serve and succour their brothers and not to further aid in their degradation by insincerity and self-seeking.... One needs a seer's vision and an angel's voice to be of any avail. I do not know of any Indian man or woman today who has those two gifts in their most complete measure.'

On the other hand she writes to her long time friend Syed Mahmud about the problem with politicians - 'Politicians will go on talking forever of it as a problem to be faced and solved but Fate has a curious and incalculable way of doing without political creeds in effecting her own solutions of the grave and crucial problems from and through personal experience and emotions.'

Sarojini Naidu's hallmark would be that in their time of need her friends and family members would find her right beside them, so what if it was only a letter. The letter was invariably a part of her. Sometimes she was just there because those she loved needed a bit of guidance. This is best exemplified by her letters to Syed Mahmud, who seemed to be stricken by his love for Sarojini. A love which Sarojini did not return in the same measure; instead she exhorts him to do his duties by his family: 'Give to your little bride all the love that is in you to give. Remember that while your life will be enriched with many things, her life will be filled entirely by you - and let your great sense of tender chivalry guard and save the woman who is yours to cherish or crush from every breath of harm and every touch of pain. Mahmud - take your little bride as my gift to you; dear, and deal with her tenderly and loyally. And

so you will always keep my love of you and your beautiful young love of me pure beyond stain and safe beyond destruction. I want her to love me and some day - some day I will go and stay with you both and hold your children in my lap and bless them.' When she writes to her son Jaisooraya she writes with a sensitivity which could be understood as her way of setting her eldest child free from the shadow of their 'famous mother'. 'My child ... we are all

lonely pilgrims seeking, seeking, seeking with passionate longing for the truth that lies beyond - we are all essentially and incommunicably lonely and must seek salvation in our own peculiar fashion, through our own special form of suffering or sacrifice, failure or temptation or triumph - the experience of one soul never can help or enlighten another ... and so, you too like the rest of us, must be prepared to make the great search alone with courage, patience and faith.'

In ways, Sarojini had accepted that Fate had mapped out a different life for her, and this is what she tries to tell Nehru: 'I cannot wish you the conventional 'good gift'. I do not think that personal happiness, comfort, leisure, wealth and such normal assets of the ordinary man and woman can have much place in your life ... Sorrow, suffering, sacrifice, anguish, strife Yes, these are the predestined gifts of life for you.'

In the end there seems to be one important question, why Sarojini? Why is Sarojini the woman who helps us, once again through her letters, to grapple with our multifaceted lives? Well, because ... 'The letters offer us a vivid portrait of Sarojini and her multi-faceted personality. They reveal a woman who had a disease-prone body but an indomitable spirit, who could withstand great pain and suffering and yet come out unscarred, who could laugh at herself and at others, who had great panache and presence of mind, who loved company and got along with a wide variety of people and who was broadminded and open to new ideas. She had the capacity to enjoy herself even under adverse circumstances. She had patience and fortitude and often offered solace and comfort to others around her. She was aware of the important role she was playing in India's national life and was confident and self-assured. She was both a great wag and wit, who had the discipline to make her personal life subservient to her public obligations. She was essentially optimistic and forward looking, with an inner faith which gave her strength. She was utterly free from prejudice of caste, race, gender, nation, or religion and, though not a feminist, worked for the cause of Indian women. Though bourgeois in sensibility, values, beliefs, she was yet an anti-imperialist, who loved spring and the bounties of nature, who tried to be a loyal wife and conscientious mother, who worked tirelessly for Hindu-Muslim unity, who until the last days of her life showed rare solicitude for others, who, in short, managed the ambivalences and the contrary pulls of her character and her times in such a manner as to make her life worthwhile and memorable.' ... because there is a little of Sarojini in each of us and yes, we wish we were more like her.

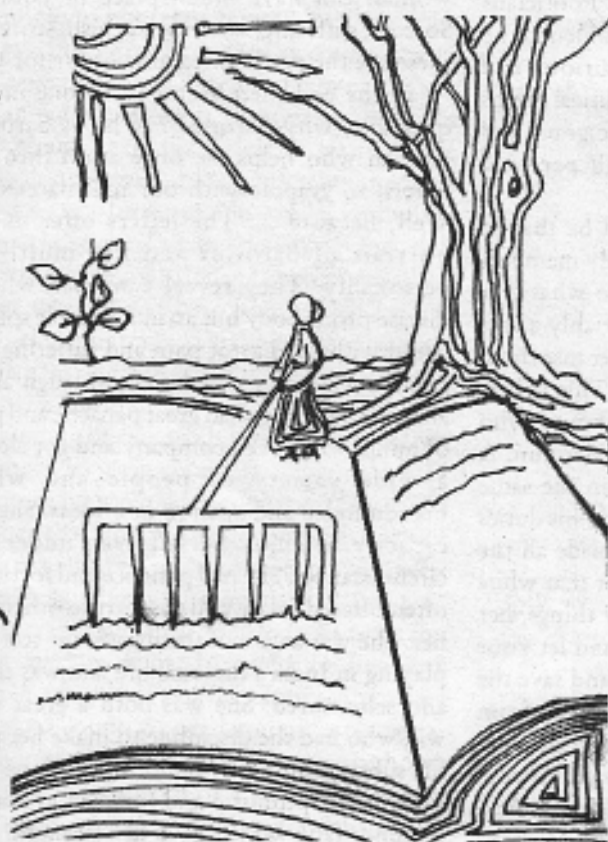
Compiled by Urmi A. Goswami



Sarojini Naidu with Mahatma Gandhi and some other delegates to the First Round Table Conference, in London 1930

Women's Writing
in India-
Problems of
Reading

K. SATCHIDANANDAN



Any meaningful discussion on women's writing today is, by compulsion, part of the larger enterprise of empowering women and this in turn joins hands with other 'transversal' struggles for social justice on various fronts. These are not only struggles against dominant groups and ideologies but are also movements for democratic plurality, creative difference, cultural heterogeneity, healthier environment, better living standards, active peace, and active non-violence, a liberating pedagogy and an egalitarianism that transcends distinctions of gender, class, race and community.

Patriarchal power is one among many forms of power that tyrannise the species today, one that creates an unequal relationship among human beings, brings into existence institutions of domination, acts upon actions making them easier or more difficult, using induction, seduction and incitement, structures their possible fields of action and even defines the nature and strategy of resistance. Power brings into operation a whole micro-physics of differentiation, legitimisation, institutionalisation and rationalisation. It not only weighs on us as a force that suppresses and negates but traverses and produces things, induces even forms of pleasure and produces 'truth-effects'— a whole 'regime' of truth to use Foucault's term— through the technologies of control, of production, of the sign and of the self.

A conscious reading of women's writing today, as also a reading of men's writing from women's point of view, will have to deconstruct the text to bring out the contradictory ideologies that constitute it, lay bare the play of power and locate the zones of resistance built into it. Such a symptomatic reading will have to travel from the text to the world and back, making constant references to the historical and polyphonic nature of the text as a linguistic artefact. In the specific context of India, we do not require an Edward Said to tell us of the interrelation between the world of words and the world of events; the everyday breaks in upon our textual explorations so much so that the borders between imagination and reality often appear to dissolve and all the claims of language to autonomy and of the text to an auto-erotic semiotic play appear suspect despite all our theoretical rigour and vigilance. Listen to a contemplative hymn by Meerabai or Lal Ded; read Mahashvetadevi's tales of valiant tribal heroines like Draupadi and a destitute tribal woman forced to sell herself in the market places of civilisation stares at you from the street; read a novel like Ismat Chughtai's *Terhi Lakeer* or Krishna Sobti's *Mitro Marjani* with their uninhibited portrayals of feminine desire and watch an advertisement that exploits women's sexuality for simple commerce. Read Kamala Das's *A Doll for a Child Prostitute* or Lalitambika Anterjanam's *The Goddess of Revenge* and hear that one more group of impoverished girls has been trapped in the red-light areas of Bombay; follow the fate of the pathetic girlchild in Balamani Amma's poem *At the pond* or Sugathakumari's poem *Girl Child in the Nineties* and let the newspaper tell you of another girl sold to an Arab, another minor raped, another bride burnt by her in-laws. These frequent interjections of sordid existence into the fables of imagination make the world and the text appear almost a seamless continuum so that we are forced to warn ourselves for reasons of objectivity that the literary text is after all a verbal construct and even its semblance of reality is only an effect of the discourse.

Only recently have women's writing begun to receive special attention among students and scholars in India. Our regional languages do have a long tradition of women's writings, especially poetry, but they have become visible on pan-Indian and international planes chiefly through anthologies of translations like *Women Writing in India*, *The Slate of Life*, *Truth-Tales*, *Inner Courtyard*, *Inner Spaces*, *In Other Words*, *Under the Silent Sun* and *In Their Own Voice* as well as translations of individual works. We now have a substantial body of women's literature, the roots of which go well into the past, from the nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers like Swarnakumari Devi and Ras Sundari Devi of Bengal, Ramabai Ranade and

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Lakshmi Bai Tilak of Marathi and Bandaru Acchamamba and Tallapragada Viswasundaramma of Telugu, to the seventeenth and eighteenth century writers like the long-suppressed Muddupalani of Telugu, Sanciya Hosannamma of Kannada, Bahinabai of Marathi and Mahlaq Bai Chanda of Urdu, to the devotional poets of the 12th to 15th centuries like Akkamahadevi of Kannada, Mirabai of Gujarati and Hindi, Gangasati and Ratnabai of Gujarati, Janabai of Marathi and Aatukuri Molla of Telugu, the medieval folksongs and to the Sangam poets of Tamil like Auvaiyar, Naccellaiyar and Velli Vitiyar of the last century before Christ (though Christ had little impact on ancient Indian history and philosophy and as such a division based on Christ should appear awkward in our situation), the Pali songs of the Buddhist nuns of the 6th century before Christ like Sumangalamata and Ubbiri and the tribal songs of the earliest inhabitants of our country. A lot of buried or censored writing by women has been unearthed and retrieved from amnesia thanks to the efforts of feminist scholars like Susie Tharu and K. Lalita. Indian women poets in English like Kamala Das, Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Anna Sujata Mathai and fiction writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandeya, have also contributed to a new awareness of women's issues among their urban middle class readership, complementing in a way, the contributions of Indian language writers to the raising of gender-consciousness at a more popular level. The militant feminine consciousness has a long, though discontinuous tradition in the Indian languages and rose to visibility in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along with the nationalist and social reform movements: and more recently pioneers like Lalitambika Anterajanam, K. Saraswathi amma, Madhavikkutty, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Hyder, Ashapura Devi, Mahasveta Devi, Krishna Sobti, Amrita Pritam and Balamani Amma, have been joined by their apparently more militant counterparts like Sarah Joseph, Gracy, Manasi, Savitri Rajeevan, and Vaidehi to Mrinal Pande, Gagan Gill, Anamika, Jameela Nishat, Rajani Parulekar, Hema Pattna Shetti and Rajlukshmee Debee to name a few among several of whose works are available in English. These writers perhaps have a more native awareness of the issues that concern ordinary women and write from a more authentic cultural milieu even though it would be simplistic to assume that they are pristinely rustic, innocent of all urbanisation and derivative consciousness.

This difference however does not, I hope create a cleavage in the ranks of the women writers who, despite differences in their perceptions and articulations, share certain

common concerns and visions. These differences of positions, attitudes, languages, themes, patterns and moorings, on the other hand lend a healthy heterogeneity to our women's writings which are otherwise likely to suffer from a dull monotony and redundancy, a potential threat to the literature of any collective movement.

Along with this spurt in women's writing, feminist readings of literature of both men and women, have also come up, questioning androcentric approaches to literary and social theory. If the close reading of the Bhakti women poets by Uma Chakravaty, Vijaya Dabbe and Robert Zydenbos, Ruth Vanita, Sonal Shukla and Madhu Kishwar is an initial effort to read ancient women's writings, Gayatri Chakravaty Spivak's multi-directional study of Mahasveta Devi's story *Stanadayini* is a unique, though, highly westernised effort in the analysis of contemporary women's literature. A lot of other women scholars from Susie Tharu, Meenakshi Mukherjee and Gita Kapoor to Vrinda Nabbar, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Jancy James and Tejaswini Niranjana, have also done considerable research work in women's literature or the portrayal of women in men's literature. However it is doubtful whether we have really evolved an indigenous way of decoding gender and reading texts foregrounding the feminine. This is however part of a general post-colonial situation where the decolonisation of culture, outlook and methods of reflection has been hampered or slowed down by various factors including a neo-colonial onslaught. One has, however, to be extremely cautious about any discussion of decolonisation today since the idea has practically been hijacked by the revivalist discourse that in our context here boils down to an invocation of the Vedic ideal of Aryan womanhood and a celebration of piety, submission to the father and the husband and the son, and even the practice of *sati*. Orientalists like William Jones and Indologists like Clarisse Bader had idealised this ascetic endurance of the ancient Indian women as against their later 'fall' into sensuousness. Indian nationalist historians also had invoked the same passive ideal in their anxiety to answer the accusations of utilitarians like James Mill, critics like Katherine Mayo and the Evangelicals who attacked 'the Hindu paganism' and the imperialists who found in India's moral degradation an opportunity to legitimate colonial rule. Decolonisation obviously does not mean retrieval of a romanticised 'golden' past; in the context of our discussion it means an objective realisation of the complexity of gender construction in India overdetermined as it is by other formations like class, caste, religion, regional cultures and languages, specific traditions, taboos, laws of marriage, sexual

Of course it is impossible to wish away the influence of various western feminist critical trends on our reading of women's literature. Our system of education has also forced us to internalise the 'universal human being' of western metaphysics as our model and our hero.

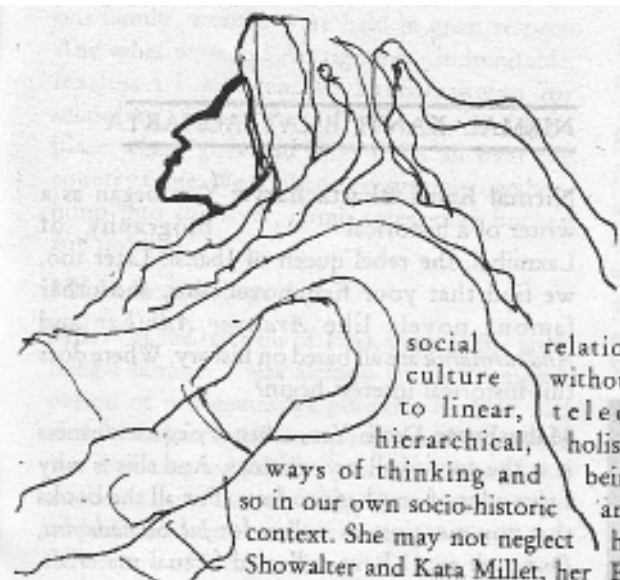


kinship and inheritance and contradictions between the country and the city, feudal moral codes and the new roles popularised by the indigenous and western media. In literary historiography it means discovering the past anew from the woman's angle, questioning the existing modes of periodisation, examining, past texts for feminine inscriptions, unburying the marginalised, relating literature to the differential articulation of the various levels of the superstructure and defining and explaining the breaks and continuities in the history of women's writing in the country. In literary theory, it means challenging the patriarchal canons, deconstructing the phallogocentric creative and critical discourse, defining the feminine in literary texts in the Indian context, unearthing the ideological configurations that lay behind the reception and rejection of literary texts in different periods, relating their formal constituents to their specific environment, thus developing an indigenous semiotics that connects signs to their specific space and lineage, decoding gender as an organising principle of experience and relating forms of feminine articulation to the changing social, racial and conceptual permutations in our history. For example, the employment of dialects and images of domesticity in the quest for spiritual deliverance in the Bhakti period, the tactical redeployment of hegemonic discourses to constitute a new,

enlightened middle class female subject in the colonial reformist period, the creation of new enunciative modalities and rhetorical strategies to articulate the gender-class nexus in the period of progressive literary trends, or the use of the body-imagery, emphasis on female bonding, appeal to the pre-oedipal phase of mental development and open defiance of the set norms and structures of writing in more recent, openly feminist, literature.

Of course it is impossible to wish away the influence of various western feminist critical trends on our reading of women's literature. Our turn towards the West was a command as Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak remarks in one of her recent interviews. Our system of education has also forced us to internalise the 'universal human being' of western metaphysics as our model and our hero. Constructing a pure East uncontaminated by contemporary global knowledge would only help the fulfilment of that Western fantasy of an Oriental Eden that helps the occidental to escape the pressures and tensions of modernisation. Theoretical enterprises anywhere in the world from Marxism to Relativity to Post-Structuralist

linguistics - have a global dimension; the post-structuralists like Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Lacan, Deleuze, Althusser, Barthes or Rorty are themselves engaged in a struggle to dismantle the Western metaphysical tradition from within and the feminists in the West are collaborators in this deconstructive enterprise that must find its natural ally in the feminists of the East. Fighting revivalist closure, nostalgia and a historical quest for purist positions is as important in our cultural context as fighting the epistemic violence of imperialism and the essentialist discourse in Western theory where the Universal is equated with the white, upperclass, male. What is required is to recognise the structures of oppression within the post-colonial space, the feminist agenda today may include developing the Marxist idea of labour so as to include domestic production, integrating the narrative of the mode of production with that of the mode of reproduction, saving the women's issue from a class-reductionist approach, promoting the awareness of the micropolitical in society, analysing and exposing the operational tactics and alienating and subjectivising strategies of male oriented ideologies and institutions in our society and foregrounding women in interpretations of history and literature. Literary studies thus form part of a social programme though this by no means, means a reification of aesthetics into sociology. Only we must be conscious of the dangers of a liberal approach, since the 'modern secular democratic' subject of the dominant discourse in India has seldom meant anything other than the high-caste, middle class, Hindu male. The strategies of reading will differ, depending on the nature of the text eg. the reading of a highly patriarchal ancient text may require an approach that is different from a sympathetic text that represents the gendered subaltern; though in both cases the critic's task is to make visible the assignment of subject-positions by unravelling the text. Wrenching the text out of its proper context and putting it within alien arguments may be at times necessary to draw out its use; it also can demonstrate the limits and limitations of the arguments from various forms of Western feminism - the Marxist, the liberal, the lesbian the American and French theories of female writing and the inscription of the body - thus forcing the reader to resituate the text within its context and obtain an insight into the continued subalternization of so-called 'third-world' literatures. She may also begin to understand why the kinds of feminist criticism that naturalise the experiences and issues of Western feminism is easily co-opted by the academy and align themselves with the apparatus of power. She will come to know that in order to intervene meaningfully in the Indian critical scene she will have to reconstitute the self, gender, knowledge,



social relations and culture without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic or binary ways of thinking and being and to do so in our own socio-historic and cultural context. She may not neglect her Elaine Showalter and Kata Millet, her Ellen Moer and Gilbert and Gubar, her Patricia Mayer Spacks and Mary Ellman, her Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, her Jane Flax and Annette Kolodny, her Julia Kristeva and even her Barbara Smith as she dances adroitly through the theoretical minefield and liberates the madwoman from the attic: but she may also warn herself against the Procrustean set of critical procedures and the straight jacket of prescriptive categories provided by many western feminists since they might not help her to understand the differences of her Indian author from her

western counterpart though they might help her understand certain similarities at the very fundamental biological and prelinguistic levels. She will come to know that the universalising theories of Western feminism alone cannot explain Janabai's fervent appeals to Vithoba, the relationships of Meera and Raidas or Mahadeviyakka and Basava, Mahasveta Devi's accounts of the tribal Jasoda or Draupadi, Sugathakumari's vision of Devaki dreaming in her prison of Krishna. Qurratulain Hyder's forays into Indian childhood and sexuality: Kamala Das's concepts of love and transcendence or Sarah Joseph's hair-symbolism that turns woman's long hair into a sign of gender identity and struggle and a site of torture for her oppressors. This resistance of the Indian text of Western theories is certain to be experienced by any reader who attempts to decode gender in these texts since even gender is constructed, despite biology, within a specific social, cultural and psychological milieu, using elements innate to them.

Prof. K Satchidanandan is an eminent poet, literary journalist, translator and educationist. His body of work concerns itself with subjects as diverse as politics, culture and theatre. Dr. Satchidanandan has always been at the forefront of the feminist discourse, assiduously exploring its validity and trends. He has won several awards for literature and is currently the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

Illustrations: Neelima Rao

the competition

Calling talent under thirty to celebrate & introspect with an all-India photo & essay competition

INDIA'S QUEST



50 years of Independence

What is INDIA'S QUEST?

As India celebrates fifty years of its independence it is time to introspect and take stock of our national directions. What is it to be Indian? What is the heritage that has survived centuries of colonial rule, and that which defines us as a sub-continent? What value does it have in a shrinking inter-dependent world? What is our future?

INDIA'S QUEST is a two-year programme for the young, jointly conducted by FUR (Foundation of Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama) and SPIC MACAY PUBLICATIONS - 'THE EYE' (Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth). It seeks to involve the young in a discourse centered around vital issues that confront the nation. INDIA'S QUEST will focus on seven themes:

- Pluralism-The challenges of religious, cultural and political pluralism in an increasingly homogenised world.
- Governance-What is polity, nationhood, responsible citizenship, leadership and what are the definitions of democracy?
- Education-The emphasis on information and acquisition of skills as the underlying aim of contemporary education. What about knowledge and wisdom?
- Environment/Technology-The challenges of sustainable development.
- Universal Responsibility and Nonviolence- within and outside the individual.
- Our Spiritual Heritage- Its validity and relevance today.
- Gender-The feminine discourse, its status today and the challenges for the contemporary Indian woman and man.

- The Photographs must be on any of the themes enlisted.
- Each photographer can send a maximum of six photographs on one or a combination of themes.
- In colour we will prefer 35 mm duplicate slides. (we will ask for originals from the winner).
- In B&W we will prefer glossy prints of approx. 8x10 or 10x12 inches.
- The photos will be judged by a panel of three eminent judges and their decisions will be final.
- The best photos and essays will be used in publications related to INDIA'S QUEST.

PHOTOGRAPHY

essay

- Essays in English, on any one of the seven themes, not exceeding 2500 words. One essay per person.
- Those writing in other languages can send us their essays translated into English.
- Essays should be typed. A computer printout is preferable.

All photos and essays will become the property of the organisers of INDIA'S QUEST and will not be returned.

the prizes

PHOTOGRAPHY

- A state of the art Canon SLR camera with lenses, for each category.
 - Second prizes for each of the themes.
- ### ESSAY
- A six volume series- *The Cultural Heritage of India* - published by the Ramakrishna Mission and Will Durrant's twelve volume series- *The Story of Civilisation*.
 - Second prizes for each of the themes.

All winners will be invited for a special audience with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama who will give away the prizes.

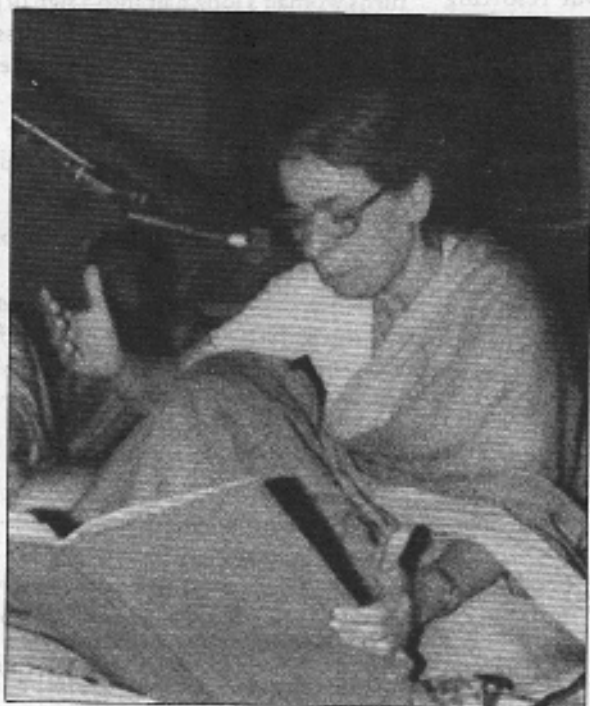
Send entries to:
The Project Coordinator,
INDIA'S QUEST,
Foundation for Universal
Responsibility

India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road,
New Delhi - 110 003

The last date for receiving entries has been extended to 15th July 1997

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THE EYE - A SPIC MACAY PUBLICATION

IN CONVERSATION WITH MAHASHVETA DEVI



*The voices of people are not always gentle, conciliatory and placatory. Every now and then a powerful, angry and anguished voice is heard above the din of mediocrity. And that voice can belong to a woman too. Such an intense voice was that of Mahashveta Devi, **litterateur par excellence**, social activist and journalist and recipient of the 1996 Jnanpith Award for literature presented to her by Nelson Mandela.*

Mahashveta Devi, from all accounts of her, has led a chequered, fiery, subversive and passionate life, weaving rebellion and concern into a warm soothing shawl for her constituency, namely, the most oppressed and exploited tribals of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Her literature has displayed, 'an anger, luminous, burning and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from hunger, landlessness, indebtedness and bonded labour.' This is the only source of inspiration for all her writing. As Dr. Satchidanandan of the Sahitya Akademi says, 'the militant feminine consciousness has a long...tradition in the Indian languages and rose to visibility in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries along with the nationalist and social reform movements'. Mahashveta Devi is one of its most notable examples.

She is 'ma' to hundreds and thousands of tribals. Her searing literary-activist pen has won her award after award. For her work with tribals she has received the Padmashree. Others have been the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 and the Amrita Puraskar.

Mahashveta Devi is the author of over forty novels, fifteen collections of stories, five books for children and one collection of plays. Fifteen of her major works have been translated into other Indian languages.

The interviewer here is a close friend of the author.

NIRMAL KANTI BHATTACHARYA

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya: You began as a writer of a historical biography of Laxmibai, the rebel queen of Jhansi. Later too, we find that your first novel *Nati*, and other famous novels like *Aranyer Adhikar* and *Andharmanik* are all based on history. Where does this historical interest begin?

Mahashveta Devi: Yes, a history-consciousness is at the core of all my writings. And this is why I give a lot of emphasis to facts. For all the books that you mention, as well as for *Jal*, *Stanadayini*, *Draupadi* etc, I have collected factual materials, sifted them assiduously and used them. I have written stories on the rituals of cremations and funerals, because I believe there is a history of evolution of these rituals in all society. And following death one can expose the root of life.

NK.B: What was the motivation behind the writing of *Jhansir Rani*.

M.D: The motivation for writing this biography came from within. What struck me about my subject was her inspiring youth and her leadership of a popular uprising. She was non-communal. Her closest soldiers were Pathans and Afghans. I thought that was a very striking fact.

NK.B: But how did you collect your material?

M.D: That is a long story. I went to the Bundelkhand area where the legend of Laxmibai lives in the lores of the common people. It was not a very easy task considering my situation at that point of time. I was unemployed. Bijon, my husband, had no money either. But with the generous support of friends and well-wishers I was able to raise a total of Rs. 400 and off I went. I visited all the places associated with Jhansi Rani and talked to a lot of common people. I discovered that the oral tradition is a very valuable source of history.

NK.B: You mentioned your husband Bijon Bhattacharya. Tell me how you got married to this great IPTA personality. Or shall we begin at the beginning, with your early life and family?

M.D: Alright. I was fortunate to be born in a fairly affluent family with a very liberal outlook. My father, Manish Ghatak was a torch-bearer in the Kallol Movement of Bengali literature. My uncle Ritwik Ghatak was also a pathbreaker in films. In our family, women were held in great respect.



Bijon Bhattacharya

our family, women were held in great respect. And what women! All tigresses - indomitable, fearless! I was sent to Shantiniketan for schooling. Tagore was still alive. It was a great place where girls and boys from all over the country came. We could do everything together - jump into the river, climb trees, play hockey and football.

NK.B: Your college days?

M.D: Let me tell you of 1943, days of the great Bengal famine. I was already going through a period of restlessness. Upheavals of 1942 had already begun to churn up my mind. My mind was searching for a shelter - both emotional and intellectual. At that time, the Communist Party of India had two students' wings - Students' Federation of India for boys and Girls' Student Association. I was in my third year at Ashutosh College when I saw hunger very closely - people dying on the Calcutta streets, bodies piled up. I joined the Girls' Student Association and started working as a volunteer in famine relief work and did some social work in slums. The experience of 1943 taught me to be with the Communist Party. I used to sell the Party papers, *Peoples' War* and *Janayuddha*. I still remember a terrible report in the Party organ on how a lot of *adivasis* used to die of snakebite in the marshland of Andhra trying to collect third grade diamond. Such knowledge is also a vital part of the experience.

NK.B: Your marriage?

M.D: In 1947 I got married to Bijon Bhattacharya. This marriage was inevitable. I was trying to move towards an ideal, an ideology. I was trying to overcome restlessness and be at peace with myself. Bijon was famous by that time. His great play, *Nabanna* was set against the background of famine. K.A. Abbas based his film *Dharti Ke Lal* on this play. At that time - in the fifties - we went to Bombay and stayed in Andheri with Shanti Bardhan of the Little Baller Troupe. Anyway, my marriage gave me my first exposure to poverty in my personal day-to-day life. It also brought me closer to the communist party - the undivided Communist Party of India, mind you, - for which I had and still have great respect. But I was never a card holding member of the party, though Bijon was.

NK.B: Any particular reason?

M.D: You see, the decade of the fifties was, on the one side, the most glorious decade of the Communist Party. There were many great peasants' movements, workers' movements, strikes and *hartals* organised by the Party. On the other hand, it was also the time when anyone connected with communism found it hard to eke a livelihood.

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NK.B: I've heard that you lost your job on the charge of being declared a communist. Is it true?

M.D: At first, not for being a communist, but for having a communist husband. I was working as a clerk in the Post and Telegraph Department during 1949-50. I was sacked because Bijon was a Communist. At that time, Atul Gupta had got a few political prisoners of RCPI released by applying *habeas corpus*. I went to Atul Gupta. When he served a notice to the Department, they rehabilitated me. But copies of Marx and Lenin were planted inside my desk and I was sacked again on a fresh charge, this time of myself being a communist.

NK.B: Later, you worked as a teacher and as a journalist too?

M.D: As a school teacher for one year during a vacancy. As a college teacher for eighteen years from 1964 to 1982. This was for my livelihood. But I worked as a journalist for an altogether different compulsion. While regularly travelling in the Palamau belt, that is, the tribal areas of Bihar and West Bengal, I felt a desperate urge to communicate to a wider audience about what was happening in the name of development and about how the tribal people were struggling to survive. I had so much to say and do in such a short time that I felt as if just fiction writing was not enough of a medium. So I started writing reportages on many topics like discrimination against tribals, police atrocities in *adivasi* areas, official acts of omissions and commissions, non-payment of minimum wages in unorganised sectors, need for literacy, irrigation and drinking water and so on. I wrote both for Bengali and English papers and magazines. It was out of this desperate urge to focus on these things that I took a two-year leave from my college in 1982 and joined a Bengali newspaper as a roving reporter. I never went back to college; I resigned my teaching job and changed to another Bengali newspaper in 1984. I gave that up also later, but till today I contribute to *Bartaman* and *Aajkaal* regularly as a freelancer.

NK.B: You were among the founders of many *adivasi* and marginalised peoples' organisations. You are currently the live-wire of Paschim Banga Kheria Sabhar Kalyan Samiti and Paschim Banga Lodha Sabhar Denotified Tribe Kalyan Samiti. As your involvement



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I feel fine about the fact that the line of distinction between my writing and my real life situation has become blurred. I believe in literary activism.

with all this work started becoming more intense, the themes of your creative writing also became more and more focussed on the marginalised, the poor and the tribals. Don't you find it limiting at times?

M.D: Not at all. Look, I have little patience with abstraction and theoretical positionings. I hate such academic research which are of little relevance to real life situations of people. I feel fine about the fact that the line of distinction between my writing and my real life has become blurred. I believe in literary activism. If you are not involved, if you are not amongst your subjects, how can you write about them? I write about people whom I know, whose hopes and aspirations I share, whose deprivation and exploitation I want to redress.

NK.B: But are they aware of your creative writings?

M.D: Even if they are not, it does not matter. But they are. Would you believe, that when *Aranyer Adbikar* got the Akademi Award, it is the Mundas who celebrated it most? They said they had learnt about their Birsha Bhagwan through this book and the whole of India would also now learn about their Birsha Bhagwan. When I was named for the Jnanpith Award, hundreds of letters poured in the Jnanpith office itself, what to speak of my residence. The letters were from the villages, hills, and marginalised people, congratulating the award givers. The award almost became a peoples' award.

NK.B: Aren't you bragging?

M.D: No Nirmal, you know me better than that. I am not bragging. It is the Jnanpith people who told me about this. I am only trying to tell you of the joys of involvement. I am only telling you that every writer should try to liberate oneself from the narrow confines of his/her own insular urban middle class existence. Many norms of this existence I find oppressive and I am amazed that others don't.

NK.B: I often find your house almost a one-person resource centre for people in distress, mostly from remote places. I find you always accessible to them, but ultimately what do you do with them?

M.D: Well, I give them temporary food and shelter while they are in Calcutta. I give them a patient hearing, try to understand their problem, personal or collective, collect all the necessary information and documents and then start shooting off letters to the relevant people, officials, departments and even ministers.

NK.B: How? I don't find any typewriter in your room, or any laptop computer.

M.D: I write all letters by hand and take an adequate number of carbon copies and then file all the papers. Every year, I write several hundred such letters, follow them up, call and meet officials and others, if necessary, whether in Calcutta or elsewhere. Sometimes I use my newspaper columns to draw the attention of the government to the problems that are brought to my notice.

NK.B: But does it work? You do not seem to be a top favourite with the West Bengal government. I don't find your name in any committee or body set up by the government, even those dealing with tribal issues. I don't remember you winning any of the several literary awards under the state government. Any comment?

M.D: Ask them for a comment. For my part, I think the powers that be are wary of what they consider to be my blundering into forbidden territories. Perhaps this causes them considerable embarrassment. You know, no government agency is comfortable with someone not afraid to take sides, someone not ready to toe the line of any political party, left, right or centre. Yet, at a personal level, I manage to evoke prompt response, if not always action, from the authorities, especially from the officials. In a fairly large number of cases, I have been able to move the government machinery into action and achieve some positive results.

NK.B: For some years now, you are very close to the Kheria Sabhar Tribe of Purulia district and Lodha Sabhar Tribe of Midnapur district. Will you tell me more about them?

M.D: Purulia is the most backward district of West Bengal by all parameters. The Kherias of Purulia are a small group of tribals. Once declared a 'criminal tribe' by the British, they have been 'denotified' after independence. They are, by all standards, the poorest people in the poorest district of West Bengal. Without any land, their sources of livelihood are virtually nil. The stigma of being a criminal tribe still haunts them and persecution of the Kherias, both by the police and mainstream society, are rampant. I try to organise them, to keep them on the right track and stop their persecution as far as possible. The Lodha Sabhars of Midnapur, numerically stronger than the Kherias, are also in the same position. The killing of Lodhas, 'Lodha-hunting' as I call it, by mainstream society, on some pretext or other was a regular feature in Midnapur district. I have been relentlessly fighting against this trend and, in recent years, I'm happy to say that the number of killings has diminished considerably.

NK.B: Of your well-known fiction works based on tribal life, perhaps the most popular novel that you wrote till date is *Hajar Churashir Ma*, based



on the Naxal Movement at Calcutta. How would you explain that? Can it be because most of your readers hail from the urban and semi-urban middle-class and they empathised with this book more than your tribal ones?

M.D: Not really. The Calcutta youth who went to the villages to organise people during the Naxalite Movement were flushed back to Calcutta by joint operations – administrative and political. Here police forces and other political party cadres were killing them. My son Nabarun was involved with the Naxals in some way or other. I wrote a few stories like *Jalsatra*, *Pindadan*, *Mother of Kanai Bairagi* etc. against the background of the Naxalite Movement. One evening, two young boys came to me. Standing on the veranda, they said, you are writing about villages. Who writes about our activities in the city? I wrote *Hazar Chirasil Ma* with those boys in mind. As I was not directly involved in the movement, I wrote about an apolitical mother who could not understand her own progeny. This is an important factor in the Naxal Movement. Even the sons and daughters of so-called communist parents took to the streets. They believed that the communism of their parents was fake. I saw idealism in the selfless dedication of those youngsters. Somehow the *puija* special number of the magazine in which I wrote the



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novel got smuggled into the jails. The Naxals started thinking of me as one of them. And the authorities started branding me as a 'revolutionary'!

NK.B: If one had to choose one particular novel out of your tribal experience, which would you recommend?

M.D: *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay* and *Pirtha*. It is a myth – my entire tribal experience has gone into it. My effort has been to use the symbol of this pre-historic animal to focus on the situation of the entire tribal community of India. In doing so, I have used fables, folklore, riddles, rituals, death-rites – all. Through the Nagesia experience I have explained other tribal experiences as well. I have not kept to the customs of one tribe alone. In the matter of respect for the dead, for example, I have mixed together the habits of many tribes. If you read it carefully, *Pterodactyl* will communicate the agony of the tribals and marginalized peoples all over the world.

NK.B: Your room is full of files, indexes and books. How do you relax, Mahashvetadi?

M.D: I watch Shahrukh Khan films whenever I can! And all my major books have been written with a transistor playing *Vivid Bharati*. A tree you put in good soil will thrive, but you'll also find some which feed on absolute rubbish and survive somehow. I'm like that.

NK.B: Well, I don't agree, but I'll let it pass for the time being. Suppose I want you to tell me in one sentence what you consider to be your commitment as a writer, what would you reply?

M.D: I believe that my commitment as a writer involves documenting peoples' struggles against an oppressive and repressive social order.

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya, Nirmal Da, to all of us at THE EYE, is the Regional Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi Calcutta. He is a keen literary connoisseur, reviewer and translator.

MYTH MAGIC

Is there a corner of this ancient country that does not have its own little bit of folklore, its unique little myth? If you know one, come share it with our readers. Just remember that the myth should have a local flavour and if it has some connections to something identifiable in the contemporary world, so much the better.

Type out your piece and rush it to us at
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Help yourself - make wiser choices.



TARSHI

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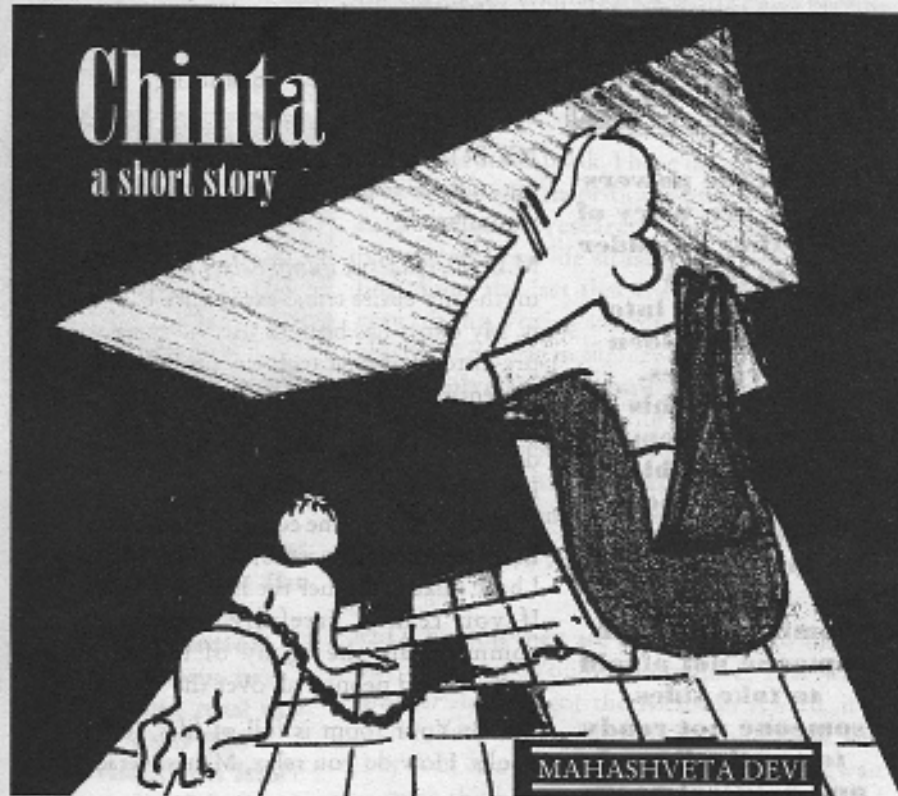


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Mon - Fri 9 am to 5 pm

Chinta

a short story



Every year a group of men and women arrived in Calcutta from around Dattan, Ghatal and Contai in the district of Midnapore. Midnapore should have promised its residents not only security of life but a means of livelihood as well. However, such was never the case. So, either before the advent of the monsoon or after the winter harvest, they arrived in the city. They literally reeked of the fields and the farms. So, Ananta, Utsav, Chaitanya, Akurur the Shaus, Pradhans and Mohantys at first approached their distinguished village brethren working in the Corporation as fitters or plumbers. Some, however straightaway stepped into neighbouring households as servants, substituting for the occasional Ananta or Kailash who wanted to return to their village homes.

The younger generation of those calculating Ghosh-Bose-Sarkar-Chatterjees who had once upon a time, purchased ponds, ditches, swamps and land at ten rupees per square foot, could now afford to keep live-in Brahmin cooks. By inheriting one or two houses and a rice field at Canning these people were able to promise a staple diet of coarse rice and mini *tangra* fish in a watery gravy to all the members of the family. Such promises have been the foundation of these joint families. However, in their respective rooms, meatsafes were loaded either with sweets or expensive apples, depending entirely on the economic strength of their respective husbands. The migrant Brahmin cooks worked in such joint families. They cooked rice and gravy, and occasionally hot fish gravy for expectant sisters-in-law. They quarrelled with the landladies over their perquisites such as *paan*, *supari*, washing soda and soap and in the afternoons they assembled in the portico to show off to their country folks. Their women rented rooms and started homes. They took up jobs in various houses, either as part-time or full time maids.

It was among them that I saw Chinta for the first time. Short, fair with broad silver bangles and a tattooed chain round her neck. She had tied a cord round her little daughter's waist as she worked in my neighbour's house. The lady of the house was rather finicky. She just could not tolerate the sight of the frail two year old girl trailing her mother from room to room as she worked. I too had been irritated by the girl's presence. Such a thin girl. Sitting in the dust

of the portico. Illness had given her a wizened look. Her two large eyes lacked curiosity. She just sat there with a lot of exhaustion, forgiveness and patience. The boys and girls of the locality derisively regarded her as a figure to be made fun of. A sort of bestial curiosity and the irrepressible cruel desire to torment the weak made their small faces appear so strange. I could not blame them either. For a long time only the house rent was being credited. But the curse of living together was that some people ended up hating each other intensely. Young children bore the burden of the loveless relationships of the elders. They aged rapidly even at their youth as they were compelled to bear the corpse of moribund relationships.

Seeing Chinta's daughter and observing the reaction of the other children I felt very hurt. I never felt so helplessly denuded before. Being ashamed I became cruel too. There could be no better way to hide one's helplessness. So I asked, "Why have you tied her up? Isn't she getting hurt?" "I have to work". Saying these words, Chinta looked at me like a beast, without any sign of protest. She cleaned loads of utensils and ground large portions of various spices. In the afternoon I watched her returning home, carrying her daughter. Her wet clinging sari attracted the vulgar stares of the Bihari *paanwallah*. As I watched her slow walk I realized that another child was on its way to being a companion of the malnourished child now in Chinta's arms.

Later I could not stop myself from asking, "Don't you have anyone at home? Can't you keep your daughter at home?" "I have no one".

She had no one. Her entire life pattern showed that she would have to keep on bearing the burden of the frail girl as well as the one to be born. This fact was amply borne out by the unflagging regularity with which she carried on her job. During the extremely chilly winter season she attended work clad in a soiled sari after having taken a bath at dawn; at ten, she sat in the portico and shared some leftover rice with her daughter; at the end of the month she had to remind the landlady for about ten days before she was given her salary of eight rupees. Understanding how helpless Chinta was, the landlady bargained stridently till the twelve rupees job was forcibly lowered to eight. Under all circumstances, Chinta remained like an unprotesting beast, tolerant and silent. Even when deductions were made from those eight rupees Chinta merely stated, "Ma has fined me". Sometimes she reported, "My clothes have been held back".

As I observed her I felt terribly ashamed. So I bribed my middle class conscience by giving her some old clothes, or by handing over some

tidbits to the little girl. At midnight, on his way back from work, the local *paanwallah* without having had a single drink, in a perfectly cool and sober frame of mind tried to molest her, tore her sari and left laughing, singing aloud. In the morning, the landlady's pet crow, with the nose-ring, snatched away the piece of bread or biscuit held by the child. Even the crow had become aware of the fact that the child was tied by the waist - that she was helpless. In the process, my own efforts to patch up my guilty conscience became futile - patchwork was unacceptable in society.

In the midst of all this, Chinta's second daughter arrived. The other maids of Chinta's group had been able to fit themselves into their new surroundings with reasonable ease. It was they who were my informers. Of late, Chinta had even lost her eight rupee job. From the assembly of maids, I could derive the information that Chinta was indeed passing through a trying time. She had to pawn her silver bangles for ten rupees. I also noticed that the other maids were urging her to borrow money from them in exchange for her solid brass utensils. They speculated that Chinta would neither be able to release her utensils nor pay them back. I realized that Chinta's plight was an opportunity for them to make some profit.

A few days later, I noticed that though she was trembling with weakness Chinta was out to work. She said, "I have kept the newborn under the care of the elder child, Ma. Do the poor die in the same manner all the time?"

Do I have to refer to Chinta in order to comprehend the stark truth that the poor die in many different ways? To care for ordinary unfortunate folks filled one's ego with a sense of smug satisfaction. Mostly, such a feeling was not a part of the unconscious. Possibly, for that precise reason I tried to be of some aid to the wretched woman with her miserable fate. I suppose such was our class heritage - to savour the satisfaction of being regarded as the benefactor of the have-nots, without undergoing any personal sacrifice or surrendering any personal interest. The expressions of such heritage were invariably putrid. As a result, the occasional torn, discarded blouse, sari, stale bread or an extra orange could not in any way repair Chinta's miserable fate. It was like the futile effort of trying to hide the cracks of a greasy wall with a colourful calendar. But if she could find some time Chinta would invariably repeat two phrases - "No one is to blame. I am the sinner."

I was not aware of the particular sin that she was hinting at. Nor did she have the energy

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to narrate the details. As I watched life streaming through my alley, the crack in the Roys' boundary wall became wider. The wall was generally used as a public one and proved convenient for drying cowdung cakes. Now an aristocratic old man of the locality made his servant collect the dungcakes forcibly. Inevitably, Lakhia's mother walked up to the front of the old man's house and voiced her protest in no uncertain terms, thereby creating quite an ugly scene. On the other hand, in the same locality flowers blossomed on the *champa* tree throughout the year with pleasant unconcern. The few flowers that dropped to the ground were carefully picked up by Nityababu's aunt for *Shiv puja*. Observing such meaningless behaviour of humanity, the upper branches of the tree, bathed in golden sunlight, giggled uncontrollably. However, not everyone could hear that laughter, that was all. Among all this, I noticed that the emaciated Chinta seemed to look a bit healthier than before. Like the trees in the city, the irrepressible desire to survive had made her derive nourishment from the arid environment. Her appearance improved. Her tattooed chain now looked quite attractive. The other day I saw that she was wearing a new sari. She said, "Ma has given it to me." Her salary too had been hiked to ten rupees.

That day there was a great deal of commotion in the locality. As far as I could guess it was regarding Chinta. A unique scene. Chinta stood in the middle of the pavement. Two men who looked as if they had recently arrived from the country were holding a boy by his arm and hollering. It was not difficult to understand that justice and religion were on their side. The one who was fair complexioned with parted hair and chewing *paan*, was shouting the most.

He yelled out, "Don't you want to pay the price for your sin?"

The assembled folks from Chinta's home district supported the accuser. Chinta did not speak a word. Then she murmured, "I cannot afford it, I am helpless."

She reached out to the young boy. But the two men pushed the boy away from her. In the afternoon, Chinta came over to me with a demand. She said, "Lend me two rupees. I will pay back."

To lend money and also expect it to be returned when I did not even know the person properly? I could not trust her proposal. Yet I did not say "no" right away. After all, this was an opportunity of finding out the actual facts behind the incident. How could I be less inquisitive than other people?

Chinta squatted on the floor. As she

her nostrils flared. She cleared her nose and wiped her eyes. In between recounting her tale of woe she would chant in a regular refrain, "I am a great sinner. I am wretched."

What I learnt from Chinta's miserable story seemed rather new to me. Chinta said, "When I became a widow I then had just one son, Gopal. I had four *bighas* of land, Ma. Two tin panelled rooms, two goats, one cow. I was still nursing my son. I didn't know anything about farming and so I pleaded with the folks of my area to help me. My maternal uncle-in-law along with other senior folks kept on advising me, "You are a young widow, deposit your land to our care." I did not agree. The relatives were infuriated. There was tremendous tension. And then I was young - in the evening strangers did the rounds of my house. I would sit inside with the door locked, holding Gopal and praying to God. Those were miserable days".

As she narrated her woes she kept on weeping a little. Suddenly, during this time, Utsav had arrived at her village from Calcutta. Utsav was good looking. He kept on making promises to Chinta. Initially, Chinta remained unperturbed. She kept her door locked. Then Utsav won over little Gopal. He bought sweets for the child. He played with the child and spoke pleasantly to him. Gradually, Chinta's heart softened towards Utsav. Abruptly halting her flow of reminiscences Chinta remarked, "Errant youth and bodily desires overcame me - I became a sinner."

Expectedly, the folks around resented their intimacy. Chinta was very scared. She was scared of her relatives, scared of her son, scared of even handing *paan* and *supari* to Utsav - only Utsav stood by her. He declared earnestly that he harboured no motives of mischief. He would marry Chinta. He would give her earrings, necklace and new bangles. To begin with people might talk. So it would be better to leave Gopal behind and go over to Calcutta. They would get married in Calcutta. Then return to the village. How could Chinta run a household without

a man? Chinta commented, "When he promised to marry me I accepted him. I am such a sinner." Then Utsav brought her to Calcutta. Fearing that her brass utensils might get stolen in her absence she carried them along with her.

What followed was an age old tale, but Chinta was not aware of it. She kept on repeating, "He escaped after ruining me. He did not marry me, nor did he give me any jewellery. Instead he beat me up, took my money and then disappeared after giving me two kids."

I asked, "Can't you go back now? Chinta answered, "I have my own ricefield, my pond is full of a variety of small fish - how can I be worried?"

Then why didn't she go back? That's where the problem lay. As she had sinned she would have to perform penance by spending two hundred rupees. She would have to treat the village folks to a full meal. Moreover she would have to abandon her two daughters. Only after going through these trials, would society be prepared to accept Chinta.

"From where shall I get so much money, Ma? As I shall never be able to procure so much money I will never be able to return to my village."

Those who had arrived today were the leaders of her village. Her uncle-in-law and his son. Till now they had looked after her son. Now the son was of marriageable age. For how long would they continue shouldering such a responsibility? Chinta should return to her village after making arrangements for her daughters. Her relations would do the needful regarding the mandatory penance. I commented, "Why don't you settle down here with your son? The boy can find some work. All of you can carry on together."

Chinta nodded her head. She was a sinner in the first place. If she dared to defy them further, then there would be no one to cremate her body after her death. They would ostracize her son as well. Could she even think of such a disaster? Who would explain to Chinta that the next world could not be any darker than the present one? She kept on mumbling to herself, "What shall I do with the two girls? What shall I do with my *Giri* and *Gouri*?"

She left after borrowing two rupees from me. She would buy sweets for her in-laws. They would not eat food cooked by her. "Those who have no one have God." Chinta kept on repeating this maxim, but which God would be able to solve the tangle of Chinta's problems I was unable to fathom.

After having the sweets Chinta's pilots of the present world - the duo, father and son, walked over to my shaded portico for their siesta. I saw Chinta's son chewing *paan* and sitting down to play cards with the cooks.

Problems were solved not by God but by human beings. In the twentieth century, around our known thoroughfares, many things took place that were sinful. This had been going on for a long time. Several meetings were held in Chinta's room. Folks offered advice and suggestions. Chinta had to borrow money to provide tea and *paan* for her people. Smiling slyly, the *paanwallah* tried to accost Chinta making signs of vulgar intimacy. That Chinta was absolutely without any resources whatsoever made him salivate and munch his *paan* excitedly. Chinta had to protect herself carefully as she possessed an attractive physique - the curse of youth. She had to make purchases from the *paanwallah* and the tea vendor's shops. The *paanwallah* was well off. If Chinta had not been so foolish and afraid of sin, she could have feathered her nest by taking advantage of the *paanwallah*'s lust. Even the *rickshawwallahs* were titillated by her. They sang aloud when they spotted her passing by.

Next day, my maid who had gone to collect water from the public tubewell rushed back with the news. She was so excited that she spilled water all the way, from the pitcher that



"No one is to blame. I am the sinner."

I was not aware of the particular sin that she was hinting at. Nor did she have the energy to narrate the details.

My maid who had gone to collect water from the public tubewell rushed back with the news. She reported, "What a sinful woman! She just sold off her daughters. One she disposed off beyond Jagubabu's bazaar - what sort of a mother was she? Shame on her!"

she was holding against her waist. She reported, "What a sinful woman! She just sold off her daughters. One she disposed off beyond Jagubabu's bazaar - what sort of a mother was she? Shame on her!"

While comparing themselves to Chinta, the other maids and servants experienced a sense of superiority and righteous indignation. All right, she had sold them off. But, who would have bought them? Giri and Gouri looked like a pair of dressed spring chicken and I kept wondering as to who could have bought them. Who could have been so benevolent?

Later, while on my evening walk, I was joined by the veteran self-appointed moral guardian of the locality who quickened his step to keep pace with me. The suppressed excitement in his face and eyes indicated that he was eager to gossip. He began, "Did you hear the latest? What else will we have to put up with!"

I was not very curious to find out what could have caused so much amusement to such a distinguished and experienced person. But his eagerness to inform me was irrepressible. He said, "Last night what a scene! In other words a scandal! That maid Chinta, you might be knowing all about her..."

He did not wait for my response. He continued, "Some odd relations of Chinta came over to my place and informed me that they had sold off Chinta's daughters at two different places for rupees ten and eight, that is eighteen rupees. They asked me to sign on the papers. I chased them away.

Could you have ever imagined such a thing? Possibly, you are aware of the kind of people who buy infant girls? Most probably they are agents - the girl trafficking racket is a big business... So I told them that whatever you have done cannot be undone - but if you don't quit this place at once, I'll inform the police... They virtually ran for their lives when I mentioned calling the police."

Then he became serious and complained, "Just see the state in which we live. None of you have any sense of social responsibility - if only all of you had taken up social work on a locality basis!"

Having made the remark he began walking briskly towards a gentleman - a Customs official, who was strolling a little ahead of us. Apparently, he had been greatly tickled by the comedy and humour of the incident.

In the morning Chinta came over to say good bye. This time she was not alone. Her advisors flanked her on either side and they carried her belongings wrapped in a sari. The boy too accompanied them, carrying a tin suitcase. I

noticed that Chinta was wearing a new sari and blouse. I did not feel like asking her how she acquired the money to buy the new clothes that she was wearing. I was afraid. As she took her leave, she did not cry. If a person was struck by an unexpected calamity then that person usually became dumb and thunderstruck. Chinta looked like such a person. Occasionally she eyed everything around her like a beast. Possibly, her eyes tried to discern whether I too regarded her as guilty.

She touched my feet with great devotion and said, "You are a very good person, Ma."

She could have left right then, but she did not do so. She stared out of the window with knitted eyebrows towards, not the sky, but an unknown destination. Now I suddenly noticed Chinta's dark black eyes and the tattooed *bindi* in between her eyebrows. As she looked on her dark eyes filled with tears, "...the poor have no God, Ma, the poor have no God."

I could observe a cunning gleam in the eyes of her companions. Lowering his voice the younger of the two said, "You won't get a bus there!"

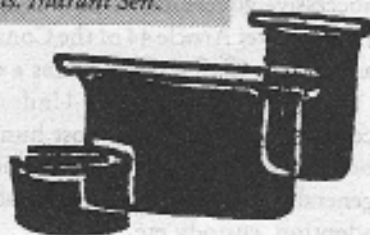
I also noticed that Chinta's son was having an argument with the older man, "Bus, train and snacks would work out to about ten rupees. Why didn't you buy me a shirt for three rupees?"

"You will get it", assured the old man. Implying, that out of those eighteen rupees, he would get his shirt.

"Those who have no God to look after them, have no one really", these were Chinta's last words before she left. She crossed the street. The two men walked on either side. The boy held the old man's hand. Now he would be able to get married. From the dowry given by the bride's family the money for the mandatory penance could be realized. Or, by pooling together money from various sources some solution could possibly be arrived at about Chinta's fate. The other three discussed Chinta's future with animated interest while she kept silent. Chinta walked slowly. She looked this side and that and then crossed the road. She almost ran as she stepped onto the opposite pavement. Then I lost sight of her.

Translated from the Bengali by Dr. Sanjukta Dasgupta.

Illustrations: Indrani Sen.



WOMEN AND THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

MEENAKSHI ARORA

It is no hidden fact that laws intrude every aspect of an individual's life. In the realms of relationships, it is the personal laws of various communities that reign supreme. Consequently, while we have penal laws, civil laws, tax laws etc. applicable to members of all communities commonly, in matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance, adoption and so on, we are governed by personal laws of different communities which are primarily religious laws or laws based on tradition, customs or usage practised by people for centuries. A flagrant violation of gender equality and the right to live with dignity is visible in different personal laws. A Muslim woman can be turned out of her matrimonial house on an oral utterance of triple talaq without adequate provision for her maintenance. She can be compelled to live with three other wives under the same roof. A Christian woman is not entitled to the same rights and grounds of divorce as her spouse is. A Hindu woman may be a co-sharer of a residential house, but has no right to claim its partition. For these and various other biases and discriminations, the personal laws need to be reformed and codified to empower women and to usher in not uniformity, but equality and gender justice. This article deals with, however briefly, some of the basic issues in this somewhat complex scenario.

I quote Bertrand Russell,

'There is very great difficulty in framing laws as regards divorce, because whatever the laws may be, judges and juries will be governed by their passions, while husbands and wives will do whatever may be necessary to circumvent the intention of the legislators.'

But when there are no laws, husbands and wives need not even look for any means to circumvent and judges governed by their passion cry hoarse, lest such laws are framed, even the basic human rights are being flouted. I am referring to the repeated reminders by the judiciary for the need to frame the Uniform Civil Code as is promised under the Constitution.

As we complete the 50th year of India's independence and forty eight years of the framing of our Constitution, the promises made by its framers have remained unfulfilled. Successive governments have come and gone over the last fifty years and yet Article 44 of the Constitution, promising the nation a Uniform Civil Code remains a dead letter.

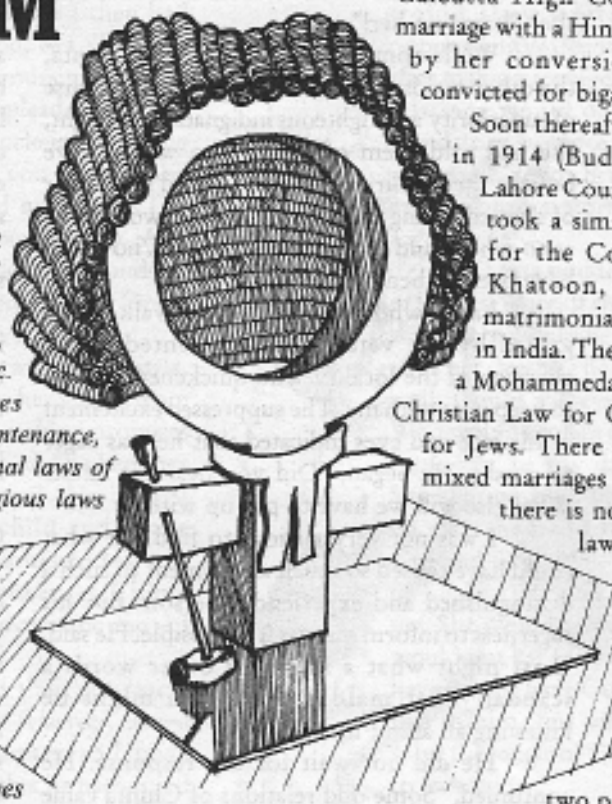
The necessity for a Uniform Civil Code has vexed this country since the last almost hundred years. A nation that has been a mingling cauldron for various religions, required a definite general law dealing with issues relating to matrimony, succession, adoption, custody etc.

As early as in 1891, in the Ram Kumari case where a Hindu wife converted into Muslim faith and then married a Mohammedan, the Calcutta High Court held that her earlier marriage with a Hindu husband was not dissolved by her conversion. She was charged and convicted for bigamy.

Soon thereafter, the Madras High Court in 1914 (Budansa Vs. Fatima), and the Lahore Court in 1920 (Nandi Vs. Crown) took a similar view. Lodge J. speaking for the Court in the case of Sayeda Khatoon, observed: 'there is no matrimonial law of general application in India. There is Hindu Law for Hindus, a Mohammedan Law for Mohammedans, a Christian Law for Christians and a Jewish Law for Jews. There is no general law regarding mixed marriages other than statute law, and there is no suggestion that the statute law is applicable But I can find no authority for the view that a marriage solemnized according to one's personal law can be dissolved according to another personal law simply because one of the two parties has changed his or her religion.'

The issue continued to vex the courts. In the Robasa Khanum case, Blagden J. out of sheer exasperation observed: 'Do then the authorities compel me to hold that one spouse can by changing his or her religious opinion (or purporting to do so) force his or her newly acquired personal law on a party to whom it is entirely alien and who does not want it? In the name of Justice, equity and good conscience, or, in more simple language, of common sense, why should this be possible? If there were no authority on the point I (personally) should have thought that so monstrous an absurdity carried its own refutation with it, so extravagant are the results that follow from it. For it is not only the question of divorce that the plaintiff's contention affects. If it is correct, it follows that a Christian husband can embrace Islam and, the next moment, three additional wives, without even the consent of the original wife.'

The issue was not to rest and a number of similar cases followed. Thus the framers of the Indian Constitution were well aware of the situation, that while adopting the salutary policy of a secular India, a need for a uniform Civil Code would become more pressing. The framers of the Constitution while deliberating over the directive principles had felt the need for a Uniform Civil Code and had assured the citizens that the State shall endeavor to secure the same.



While so deliberating, the Constituent Assembly had also deliberated that the State shall endeavour to secure that marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and shall be maintained through mutual co-operation with equal rights of husband and wife as the basis. The rights which the Constituent Assembly endeavoured to secure to its citizens were so basic such as equality between husband and wife which in fact, were already contained in the Fundamental Rights. The rights of citizens have to be tested against the touch-stone of the rights of equality before the law or the equal protection of the law, or for that matter, the guarantee of non-discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Hence Article 44 of the Constitution came to be inserted, promising that the State shall endeavour to secure for its citizens a uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India.

In 1985, the judgment of the Supreme Court of India in the Shah Bano Begum case had created ripples throughout the country reminding the citizens of the Constitutional promise under Article 44 and that they were entitled to certain basic rights whether or not such rights were codified. The rights were so basic in nature, namely the right of a Muslim wife to maintenance, that the Supreme Court, while granting the same, noted that it was a matter of regret that Article 44 of our Constitution had remained a dead letter. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court noted that there was no evidence of any activity on the part of the official machinery to fulfil the commitment made by the Republic of India for its citizens.

Ten years later, in May 1995, the Supreme Court has once again, with anguish, reiterated the need for a Uniform Civil Code through its judgement in the case of Sarla Mudgal Vs. Union of India. Over a year has passed since the rendition of the judgement of the case of Sarla Mudgal, reminding the Government to implement the mandate of the Constitution under Article 44. The Government has not even deemed it fit to call for a nationwide debate on the subject.

The Courts throughout the country, particularly, the Supreme Court has made attempts whenever occasions did arise, to bridge the gap between personal laws in the absence of a common Civil Code. Laudable though such attempts have been,

they are definitely far from achieving the promise of uniform civil rights to the citizens of this country.

However urgent and necessary the need may be for such a Uniform Civil Code, it is apparent that the political will and the courage to legislate it, is entirely lacking. It is with anguish that one notes how a political will is gathered on issues which perhaps affect only the legislators or their vested rights and bills

are hurriedly framed and placed on the floor of the Parliament without even calling for a national debate or discussion. Issues of great significance such as the Uniform Civil Code, which affect the rights of every citizen of this country are not even deliberated upon.

The rampant abuse of archaic personal laws by those seeking to defeat the statutory provisions and to over-reach penal justice is definitely a denial of Fundamental Rights. A large number of Muslim countries have today done away with their archaic personal laws, replacing them with codified enactments. Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan and some other Islamic countries have codified their personal laws which have guaranteed basic rights to both spouses.

While the need for a Uniform Civil Code is urgent and pressing, the need for a nationwide debate and deliberation on the subject is even more important. The Uniform Civil Code need not take away from the communities, their culture, rituals and practices

while safeguarding the rights of divorce, maintenance, succession, etc. Due care can be taken to build into the legislation, the rituals and cultural practices of the community. In the absence of an affirmative action on the part of the government, let the women of various communities come forward on a common platform and propose a Uniform Civil Code which would not only secure to them their basic human rights but also build into it their norms and culture.

Meenakshi Arora is an Advocate on Record in the Supreme Court of India. She has done her law from MS University, Baroda. Though she does broad-based litigation ranging from constitutional to commercial and criminal matters, her special interests lie in working on the basic rights of women and children, where rights haven't been crystallised, either by legislature or the judiciary. She is particularly oriented towards sensitising the judiciary towards gender issues.

Illustration: Shounak Ray



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AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

We have used and will be using pictures that have come to us in response to the Essay and Photo Competition announcement of INDIA'S QUEST. However, we would like to stress that these pictures are not necessarily prize winning entries. You will note that the competition date has been extended and therefore all judging of entries will be done after the final date.

RABIA OF BASRA

JOHARA SHAHABUDDIN

'The history of mystical literature shows that women were among the outstanding representatives of the tendency toward mystical autobiography and subjectivism in expressing religious experience.'

Gershom S. Scholem

'The mainspring of Muslim religious life during the eighth century was fear - fear of God, fear of hell, fear of death, fear of sin - but the opposite motive had already begun to make the influence felt, and produced in the saintly woman Rabia at least one conspicuous example of truly mystical self-abandonment.'

Reynold A. Nicholson

No, she wasn't a single woman
But a hundred men over:
Robed in the quintessence of pain
From foot to face, immersed in the Truth,
Effaced in the radiance of God,
And liberated from all excess.

Such is the ecstatic praise that Fariduddin Attar, the famous twelfth century Sufi poet of Nishapur, Persia has for Rabia al-Adawiyya (717-801 AD) in his valuable treatise *Memoirs of the Saints*. Acknowledged to be the foremost among all the Muslims of her time, it was a woman who became renowned as the 'Crown of Men'. Born eighty-five years after the death of Prophet Mohammed, and living for as many years more, this lady is one of the best known saints in the early history of Islam.

Rabia was not alone, not an anomaly in her time, and not down the ages of Islamic history. In my own childhood's force-fed diet of anecdotes, there have been healthy (hence memorable!) doses of Khadija, the Prophet's first and only wife till she died, Fatima, his daughter and a saint in her own right, and Ayesha, his favourite wife. All three women are among those revered and loved next only to the Prophet. My favourite and one that I actually loved reading about was Ayesha. She kept coming up with questions that never failed to give the Prophet something to think about. Several Koranic revelations are in response to her problems.

Fed on a diet of women such as these, Rabia Basri (as she is commonly referred to, being a resident of the town of Basra on the banks of the Tigris, south of Baghdad, in present day Iraq) is a matter of course for traditionally brought-up Muslims. The acknowledgement of her superiority over all the people of her time is easily reconciled with opposite notions about the inherent

superiority of the male over the female by calmly according her a special status of closeness to God. And in the same way, her independence is unchallenged, and happily reconciled with the decision-making power of the male over the female.

In her own time, it does not seem to have been so easy for her. Legend has it that when Rabia's reputation for sanctity became well-known, one night, three or four people met and began to deride her. "Such a woman has set herself up," they decided, "to attract public attention to herself. Let's visit her and subject her to an examination."

So they dressed up as Lebanese pilgrims the next day and went to Rabia's house. A servant opened the door, heard their tale and said, "O devotees, I have wept so much in sympathy with Rabia that my eyes are ill. Won't you breathe on them so that by the grace of your breath I can regain my sight?" They pretended to bless her by breathing on her eyes and Rabia's servant was healed.

The visitors realized that they had nothing to do with this miracle and exclaimed, "We are liars coming here; It is God alone, the Exalted,

In the history of Islam, the woman saint made her appearance at a very early time, and the dignity of sainthood was conferred on women as much as on men. Rank among the 'friends of God' was equal between the sexes.

Rabia was a freed woman and was known as al-Adawiyya. Her biographer Attar wrote of her:

"That one set apart in the seclusion of holiness, that woman veiled with the veil of religious sincerity, that one on fire with love and longing, that one enamoured of the desire to approach her lord and be consumed in his glory, that woman who lost herself in union with the divine, that one accepted by men as a second spotless Mary - Rabia al Adawiyya, may God have mercy upon her. If anyone were to say, 'Why have you made mention of her in the class of men?' I should say, 'God does not look upon the outward forms... if it is allowable to accept two-thirds of our faith from Ayesha, the trustworthy (Mohammed's wife from whom many traditions derived), it is also allowable to accept benefit from one of her handmaids...'

Moreover, the high position attained by women saints is attested further by the fact that Sufis themselves give to a woman the first place among the earliest Mohammedan mystics and have chosen her to be the representative of the first development of mysticism in

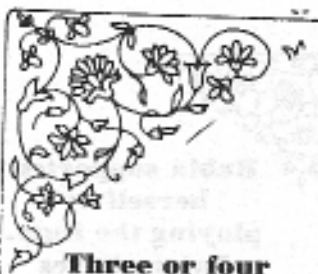
who could perform such subtle work. Had we come here in sincerity, imagine what our state would be!" They repented, gave away all their worldly belongings to the poor and became saints.

In another attempt to test her piety, one day a group of people unexpectedly dropped in to see her. "Every single virtue has been showered on men," they said. "The girdle of beneficence is tied around the waists of men, the crown of chivalry rests only on their heads, no woman has ever been a Prophet.² So why are you pretending to be so saintly?"

"Everything you say is true," said Rabia, unperturbed. "But vanity, egotism, selfish conceit and 'I am your Lord most high' have never risen from a woman's breast, nor has any woman ever been a pederast."³

Rabia Basri is a woman on fire with a passionate love for God. There are reports of her quaking at the very mention of Hell. After a certain dream, she began to worship all night without fail for the rest of her life. It is said that after her evening prayers she would go to the roof and pray,

*O Lord, the stars are shining
and the eyes of men are closed,
Every lover is alone with his beloved,*



Three or four people met and began to deride her. "Such a woman has set herself up," they decided, "to attract public attention to herself. Let's visit her and subject her to an examination."



And here I am alone with thee.

Then she would worship all night and at daybreak, sing,

*O my joy, my longing,
O my sanctuary, my companion,
O Provision of my way, O my ultimate aim!
You are my spirit, You are my hope,
You are my friend, My yearning, my welfare,
Without you, O my life and love,
Never across these endless countries
would I have wandered.
How much graces, how many gifts
have you showered me with.
Your love I seek; in it I am blessed,
O radiant eye of my burning heart,
You are my heart's captain!
As long as I live, never from you
Shall I be free.
Be satisfied with me, O my heart's desire,
And I am fortunate, blessed.*

Her best-known prayer, where the purity of her desire for God shines through, is this one.

*O Lord, if I worship Thee in fear of Hell,
burn me in Hell.
And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise,
exclude me from Paradise.
But if I worship Thee for Thy own sake,*

Islam. This was the saintly Rabia of Al-Attik tribe, hence her name al Adawiyya.

A.E.I. Falconer, Sufi Literature and the Journey to Immortality



Over and over again, people have asked this *faqir* the distinction, if any, between men and women in Sufism. The question often asked is whether or not there have been any women among the Sufis who attained the station of *Ensan-e-Kamel*, The Perfect Human Being.

Throughout the *Koran*, there are many instances in which God concurrently addresses both women and men believers. The significance of these exhortations is that, in terms of their faith (*iman*), man and woman are equal. Furthermore, all great Sufi masters have held the firm conviction that any woman who engages in the Path of Divine Love is not to be deemed 'female' in the sense of being passive, but rather to be judged solely by her humanity. The wide circulation of the following adage, popular for centuries among Sufis, testifies to this, 'The seeker of God is masculine'.

Citing Abbasah Tulsi, in his *Memoirs of the Saints*, Attar has written, 'When tomorrow, on doomsday, the cry goes up, "Oh men", the first person to step forward will be Mary, the Mother of Jesus.'

Suffice it to say that women who seriously set foot on

the path toward Reality are in exactly the same category as men who do so. Or to express it somewhat differently, since in the Ocean of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), neither 'I' nor 'you' exists, what meaning can 'man' or 'woman' possibly have? In the words of an anonymous Arab poet,

*If it is women we have sung of,
Well yes, woman excels man.
That the sun is feminine is no flaw,
Nor honour if the moon be masculine.*

Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh
Sufi Women



Rabia Basri's story is best told in Fariduddin Attar's words in his mystical treasure *Conference of the Birds*:

"The night when Rabia came to earth, there was nothing whatsoever in her father's house; for her father lived in very poor circumstances. He did not possess even one drop of oil to anoint her navel; there was no lamp, and not a rag to swaddle her in. He already had three daughters, and Rabia was his fourth, that is why she was called by that name.

"Go to neighbour So-and-So and beg for a drop of oil so that I can light the lamp," his wife said to him.

Now the man had entered into a covenant that he would never ask any mortal for anything. So he went out and just laid his hand on the neighbour's door and returned.

"They will not open the door," he reported.

The poor woman wept bitterly. In that anxious state the man placed his head on his knees and went to sleep. He dreamed that he saw the Prophet.

"Be not sorrowful," the Prophet bade him. "The girl child who has just come to earth is a queen among women. Go to the governor of Basra and tell him. Every night you send upon Me a hundred blessings, and on Friday night four hundred. Last night was Friday night and you forgot Me. In expiation for that, give this man four hundred dinars lawfully acquired." Rabia's father on awaking burst into tears. He rose up and wrote a message to the governor.

When the governor had read the letter he said, "Give two thousand dinars to the poor as a thank-offering because the Prophet had me in mind, and four hundred dinars to that Sheikh and say to him that I desire that he should come before me that I may see him, but it is not fitting that such a person as he is should come to me, but I will come and rub my beard on his threshold!"

When Rabia had become a little older, and her mother and father were dead, a famine came upon Basra and her sisters were scattered. Rabia ventured out and was seen by a wicked man who seized her and then sold her for six dirhams. Her purchaser put her to hard labour. By day she continually fasted and served in the house of her master, and by night she worshipped standing until day. One night her master awoke from sleep and, looking through the window of his apartment, saw Rabia praying. "O God, Thou knowest that the desire of my heart is in conformity with Thy command. If the affair lay with me, I would not rest one hour from serving Thee; but Thou Thyself has set me under the hand of a creature."



Rabia supported herself by playing the flute. Later stories refer to her planting a field, and buying her food by selling spools of yarn she had spun. She refused all charity.



Such was her litany. Her master perceived a lantern suspended without any chain above her head and the light which filled the whole house. Seeing this, he was afraid. Rising up, he returned to his bedroom and sat pondering till dawn. When day broke he summoned Rabia and set her free. He said, "If you remain with us, we shall all serve you, if you do not wish this to happen, go where you will."

"Give me permission to depart," she said.

He gave her leave, and she left the house and went into the desert. From the desert she proceeded to a hermitage.

Then she determined to perform the pilgrimage, and set her face towards the desert. She bound her bundle upon an ass. In the heart of the desert the ass died.

"Let us carry your load," the men in the party said.

"You go on," she said. "I have not come putting my trust in you."

So the men departed, and Rabia remained alone.

"O God," she cried, lifting her head, "Do kings so treat a woman who is a stranger and powerless? Thou hast invited me to Thy house, then in the midst of the way Thou has suffered my ass to die, leaving me alone in the desert!"

Hardly had she finished saying this, when her ass stirred and rose up. Rabia continued on her way. The narrator of this story reports that some while afterwards he saw that little donkey being sold in the market.

There is a report that in the beginning, after getting her freedom, Rabia supported herself by playing the flute. Later stories refer to her planting a field, and buying her food by selling spools of yarn she had spun. She refused all charity, retorting to several different offerers. "It shames me even to ask anything of God who is your Sovereign. So tell me how can I ask anything of you, His servant?"

Her friend Malek Dinar, himself quite famous, describes her lifestyle as follows. "I visited the saint. She had a pitcher with a crack, a burnt brick for a pillow and an old straw mat. I was anguished and asked, 'I have rich friends who would love to help you out.' Needless to say, instant was the reply, 'God knows of my state, what need is there to remind Him?'"

Rabia is straight of tongue and hardly tries to please when she speaks. Hasan al-Basri, several decades her senior, is another very well-known saint of the time. Stories of Rabia and Hasan are a whole genre in themselves. He was immensely fond of her and would not commence his sermons without her, saying, "What is meant for an elephant cannot be digested by ants." But Rabia betters him every time.

A story my grandmother tells from memory is that once Hasan al-Basri challenged her to pray on water. Rabia threw her mat into the air and prayed above him, where he could not follow her. Then she said, "What you did, fishes do. What I did, flies do. The real business is different from both." This allegorical story contradicts the convention that women must pray behind men in mosques.

Once, Rabia had retreated to the mountains and wild animals, goats and gazelles were thronged around her when suddenly, Hasan appeared. The animals all scattered in fright. Hasan asked, "Why are they friends with you but run away from me?"

"What did you eat today?" asked Rabia in return. "A mere broth," replied Hasan.

"Well, you eat of their fat. Why shouldn't they be afraid of you?"

On another occasion, Rabia happened to be walking in Hasan's *gali*. Hasan was weeping on his roof and a tear dropped on Rabia. "What's this?" she wondered. Realizing Hasan was crying above her, she called out, "O Hasan, if these are the sobs of your ego's foolishness, control yourself."

Rabia had frequent visitors, distinguished scholars and men of God. People looked up to these men, but she dealt with their faults. Once she was ill and three visitors tried to say the right thing.

To the first she retorted, "What you say stinks of egoism."

To the second, "You have to do better than that."

Another sat by her bedside and reviled the world. "You love the world very dearly," said Rabia. So one of them said, "Since one cannot speak about your situation, say something about mine." "You love reciting traditions," was the reply, implying he loved the status that goes with this knowledge. The man was deeply moved and prayed that God may be satisfied with his work. "Aren't you ashamed to seek the contentment of one with Whom you yourself are not content?"

Living by herself (with the enigmatic maidservant. Who was this person whose service Rabia accepted, was she a friend, a devotee, a student, a temporary aberration?), receiving men was highly unconventional. But then so much about Rabia was unconventional. She chose poverty at a time when Baghdad was on its way to opulence. She chose celibacy when most of the Islamic world sees marriage as a religious duty. She chose to live independently despite the right given to Muslim women to not work and be supported by her nearest male relative, or master. On top of all this, a vegetarian in a food culture based around meat, and one with a salty tongue.

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There are many tales also of the pious men who send proposals for marriage, or come with such proposals. To some her reply is the same, "The marriage bond concerns a Being. I have no Being. My Being belongs to God. I am his possession."

Rabia may have been married early on in her life, say some commentators. This poem attributed to her also suggests this,

*Within my heart I established you
As a Friend with whom I could converse.
My body I offered to one
Who wished to be next to me.
I see my body as being good for
Sitting next to, but my heart's Lover
Alone is the Friend of my heart.*

But this poem may also have merely referred to sitting next to men and women who came to visit her.

The following anecdotes seem to suggest that some of her friends needed to defend Rabia's honour in the face of the fact that so many men visited her. Hasan al-Basri says, "I spent a day and a night with Rabia discussing the Way (*tarikat*) and the Truth (*haqiqat*), but it never occurred to her to me that one of us was female and the other male. But when I left her I felt lost. While she, I saw, was totally immersed in God."

Describing an overnight visit, Sofyan Thawri, a famous Sufi of the time has written, "I saw her go to her prayer niche and pray till dawn. In the opposite corner of the house I also prayed till daybreak. With sunrise she suggested we spend the day fasting to express gratitude for the grace by which we maintained the night vigil."

Rabia al-Adawiyya is the foremost authority on the doctrine of Love within Sufism. Two quotations made much of by the learned, centuries after she said them, came into being as follows. The first was when she asked a saint his state. He replied, "I have trod the path of obedience (Islam) and have not sinned since God created me."

She said, "Alas, my son, thine existence is a sin wherewith no other sin can be compared." This meant that Being belongs only to God. Most people cannot escape affirming the existence of other than God and in so doing, affirm the root of all evil.

The second saying is from the time when a group of famous men came to visit and Rabia asked, "Why do you worship God?" One said, "There is terror in the seven levels of Hell."

Another said, "There is tranquility and beauty in Paradise."

Rabia responded, "Only a bad slave is devoted to his master out of fear of punishment or desire

"Then why do you worship?" Rabia was asked.

"The Neighbour first, then the House," said she.

A strange incident occurred when Rabia arrived in Mecca for the pilgrimage. One report goes that she saw visions and through them, God caused her to menstruate. Thus He deliberately denies her the ritual purity necessary to enter the sacred mosque of *Kaaba*, the House of God. Rabia is inflamed. "O Lord, You don't allow me entry into Your House, nor did you let me rest at home in Basra. I did not want to come, You brought me here!" So saying, she returned to Basra.

What can be the hidden meaning of this story? Later Sufis have gone ecstatic over this story. From a generation that challenges the very notion of ritual impurity due to menstruation, I love Rabia's shouting at God. But our modern concerns are highly likely to be irrelevant to deeper levels of understanding. In fact, nowhere does Rabia bring up explicitly a personal concern about being a woman in a male-dominated society. Does this anecdote signal an exception?

Being a vegetarian and a single woman myself, I told my pestering relatives, "Rabia Basri never married, and she was also vegetarian! If she can do this, why can't I?" And I was gently told that what saints and prophets do does not apply to me who certainly lacks any understanding. This is true. A bald parakeet who talks, goes the old Sufi story, is not a dervish.

This is not a complete nor an authoritative account of Rabia al-Adawiyya of Basra. My references are chiefly Charis Waddu's *Women in Muslim History*, and Javad Nurbakhsh's *Sufi Women*. Incomplete in my faith, new to the subject, and limited to English, I write this only in the hope of lifting a little of the veil that covers Islam.

NOTES

1 'Sufi' literally refers to someone who wears wool, 'Suf' means wool. Sufism used to be the name given to those who embodied Islamic teachings in the highest sense, as in the days of Rabia. In course of time, the ideas of these saints were corrupted, and others too came to call themselves Sufis. There are now Sufis who distance themselves from other Muslims and vice versa.

2 Some scholars put women such as Eve, Queen of Sheba and Mary, Mother of Christ, in the same rank as the Prophets.

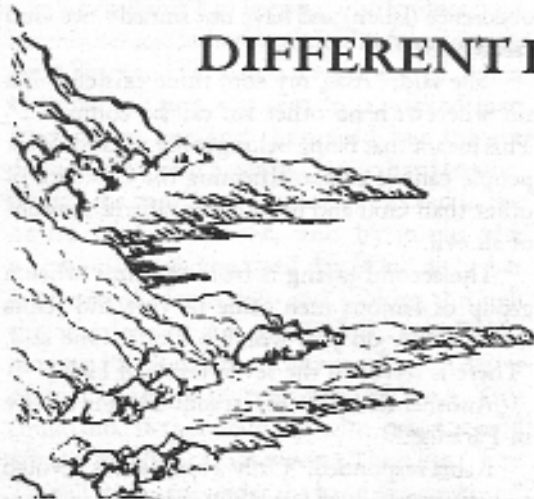
3 The visitors had referred to instances of men in religious teachings and Rabia replied in the same coin.



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Illustrations: Indrani Sen

DIFFERENT EQUALS



The softness of woman, when tempered with hardness, cannot be overcome; the hardness of man, when tempered with softness, cannot be broken.

Strengthen woman with hardness and moving that she may find understanding in water and man; strengthen man with softness and waiting that he may find understanding in earth and woman.

When there is balance, man and woman will meet as different equals. He will be to her the strength of waiting water and she will be to him the strength of moving earth.

Tao of Relationships



SOARING WITH THE EAGLE

The author traces a very brief history of the women's movement in the West and tells us that things are far from being well even today.



Mary Wollstonecraft had set in motion an engine of change which would roll slowly for the next 100 years and gradually gather momentum in our own century.



There is a myth from North America which likens the relationship between men and women to the wings of an eagle. This bird of immense power has the ability to soar to great heights on two equal wings, one male and one female. If either wing is damaged or fractured in any way, the body of life which exists between them cannot be sustained.

In Judeo-Christian mythology the story of harmony between the sexes is not so balanced. Having made the world and all other species, God creates the first man Adam and sets him in Eden, the garden of earthly delights. As time passes, God realises that Adam is lonely, and fashions the first woman Eve from Adam's rib. Together they live a blissful existence in this earthly paradise, until one day Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In turn she persuades Adam to taste the fruit, and they both become conscious beings with the ability to make moral choices.

Divine retribution for this first 'sin' is swift and terrible. God expels them from the Garden of Eden and they are condemned to a life of toil, ageing and death. For Eve he reserves additional punishment, and she is cursed for her defiance: "I will increase your labour and your groaning, and in labour you shall bear children. You shall be eager for your husband, and he shall be your master."

With such a story enshrined in the first few pages of the most sacred text in Christendom, it is hardly surprising that the balance between male and female has been less than harmonious. Formerly damage was limited to a loose interpretation of the script by a few people living in the Middle East. However when Christianity spread throughout Europe, and the early church fathers increasingly saw women and sexuality as the sources of evil, then it was not long before sinister attitudes towards women began to develop; they were seen as 'the devil's gateway' and the original sin of Eve continued to hammer at European consciousness.

As a consequence, women finally fell prey to one of the most shameful episodes in European history. At a time of great political and social upheaval, when the old feudal order of kings, nobles and peasants was breaking down, women were crushed under the onslaught of witch hunting. For more than 300 years they were cruelly tortured and burned alive as Christian misogyny (woman hatred) ran amok. Feminine sensibility was reduced to a lurking shadow which dared not show itself. The gender balance has never fully recovered.

In continental Europe women became the mere chattels of men with no property rights or jurisdiction over their own children. They had no civil rights and no education save that necessary to fulfil the function of plaything or slave. They were denied entrance to the professions and at the same time expected to have qualities and virtues not expected of men.

Eve was held responsible for bringing evil into the world, an example of the myth of the evilness of women



CHANGING ATTITUDES

In 1762 the prevalent attitude towards women was well expressed in the words of the philosopher Jean Jaques Rousseau: 'Men and women are made for each other, but their mutual dependence is not equal. We could survive without them better than they could without us. They are dependent on our feelings, on the price we put on their merits, on the value we set on their attractions and on their virtues. Thus women's entire education should be planned in relation to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to win their love and respect, to raise them as children, to care for them as adults, counsel and console them, make their lives sweet and pleasant.'

However, with the emergence of a new world order in which a growing educated middle class questioned social shortcomings, women began to raise the issue of their own inequality. In such a climate modern feminism was born. The age which saw the American War of Independence and the French Revolution also gave voice to the cause of oppressed people. There was call for the emancipation of slaves and the welfare of the homeless and hungry. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It became an instant best-seller, and is the foundation of modern feminism.

In this short 300-page volume Mary admonished the prevailing attitude of her time. She argued that women were born equal, but raised to be subordinate: 'She is brought up to be toy of a man, his rattle and must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason he chooses to be amused.'

Such words came at a time when industrialisation progressively marginalised women's work, and the man was sent out as the breadwinner for the family. Mary Wollstonecraft pointed out that such financial dependence on a man was little short of 'legal prostitution' and that denial of political rights, equal pay and education was nothing short of tyranny. She called for the right of women to enter male preserves in education, medicine and politics, even going so far as to suggest that women should have their own political representatives to fight their cause.

SLOW PROGRESS

Mary Wollstonecraft had set in motion an engine of change which would roll slowly for the next 100 years and gradually gather momentum in our own century. By 1907, the move towards women's suffrage (consent expressed by voting) was gaining

popular appeal. The magazine, *Votes for Women* was selling 40,000 copies a week, and women had become politically active in the trade union movement. However, it took the terrible upheaval of the First World War before the right to vote was finally won. 1914-1918 saw one of the most barbaric wars in history in which a generation of young men was gutted. As a consequence women were drafted in to do 'men's work' in the engineering and armaments factories. This gave them patriotic status, which, coupled with a British government weakened by the war, meant that new legislation was introduced giving women over thirty the vote.

While the Russian Revolution carved out new systems for living, the West underwent a transformation which influenced every aspect of our culture - the jazz age. Spreading from New Orleans at the turn of the century and sweeping across Europe in the twenties and thirties, this music epitomised freedom from tyranny - the clarion call to a new liberal era. Fashions changed giving women a new freedom of movement and expression. Historian

Lewis Mumford made the following observation, 'Consider the gain in physical freedom modern woman made, when the corset and petticoats, the breast-deformers, pelvis constrictors, back-bone-curvers of the Victorian period gave way to the garb of the early 1920's, without girdle, brassiere, or even stocking supporters.' Such new found liberation seeped into all aspects of private and public life, but it took the Second World War for the next radical change to occur.



In the West women and 'dirt' have long been the subjects of powerful taboos. Suffragettes campaigning for votes for women.



MAN, MYTH AND MAGIC

Witch hysteria rose to a peak in the 16th and 17th centuries. From the film *Witchcraft Through the Ages*.

Between 1939 and 1945, millions of women went to work for the first time as back up to the armed services, in hospitals, in munitions factories and on the land. There was no looking back from this period in history, and in spite of numerous setbacks there has been an overall movement towards women's equality.

When Rock n'Roll took Europe by storm (sounding from the same historical centre as blues and jazz) it is no accident that fashions further liberalised bodily movement. At the same time, the female contraceptive pill was developed. At last women had a measure of control over their own fertility, and this right to choose has contributed to falling birthrates in overpopulated industrialised countries.

However, as far as equality is concerned there's

still a long way to go. The UK has seen its first woman Prime Minister who during her eleven year period in office did a great deal to set back years of painstaking feminist progress! The mindless easy fix of privatisation and monetarism was a social disaster which undermined trade union gains, health provision, social services, rights at work, and an open caring community. In the aftermath, a new underclass has been created where 65 % of the 'officially poor' are women - many of them homeless and victims of domestic violence.

A ROAD HALF TRAVELLED

In spite of decades of so-called equal rights and opportunities, women are seldom found in the corridors of power in politics, medicine, business or the media. Surveys reveal that women still do far more than their fair share of housework, child-minding, meal preparation, washing and ironing. A United Nations Report (1980) concluded that 'Women make up half the world's population, perform two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income, and own less than one-hundredth of its property.'

A more recent report in 1995 makes even grimmer reading. It was forced to admit that 'violence stalks women throughout their lives, from cradle to grave.' Female infanticide is still widely practised in many areas of the world where males have a higher value than females. It is particularly ironic that women have traditionally taken the blame for producing too many female offspring, when it is the male sperm which determines the sex of a child. Moreover the early development of all fetuses begin as female - it is only later that male hormones come into play giving baby boys varying degrees of masculinity.

Gender violence is rife throughout female adolescence. It affects well over 85 million girls who have been subjected to genital mutilation in the form of female circumcision - 15 % of

these have undergone the most severe form which leaves only a small opening in the vulva for urine and menstrual blood to pass through. Girls are usually the target of child sexual abuse where it is estimated in some industrialised countries that up to 34 % of women were sexually abused during childhood. Up to one in five US women will be the victim of completed rape in her lifetime, and rape became a weapon of war in Bosnia where 20,000 Muslim women were violated in 1992. Large scale surveys in ten countries estimate that between 17 and 33 % of women have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner.

The movement towards globalisation has brought benefits to a new international women's movement. The telephone, photocopier, fax machine and internet all contribute to a growing awareness of female identity and solidarity. Sadly the tendrils of the free market economy will at the same time creep into all aspects of public and domestic existence.

In this brave new world women become little more than factory fodder, their nimble fingers and capacity for repetitive work being ideally suited to modern manufacturing techniques. This destructive new economy which relies on instant flights of capital, short term working contracts, downsizing and the progressive search for cheap labour threatens the fabric of family stability and women's achievements all over the world.

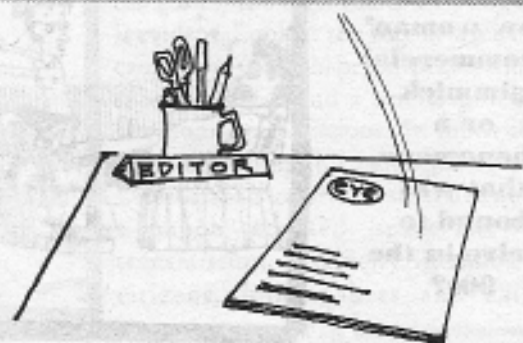
In addition we face the reality of environmental destruction which in part is caused by the denial of the feminine in us all. The human race depends on Mother Earth for its continued existence - if we deny this most mystical of unions then it will be

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Illustrations: Rustam Vania

Got something on your mind? Want to let off steam? Or do you just like to write for the sheer fun of it? THE EYE would love to hear from you. It could be a solitude-musing, a humorous anecdote, l'affaire de coeur, an insightful experience or a long drawn out sigh. It could be sheer fantasy or frill-less, gut-searing truth. That's quite a long rope, isn't it? So get out that pen-and-paper or tape-recorder or laptop and give in to inspiration. We are waiting to hear from you.

A SPACE OF YOUR OWN

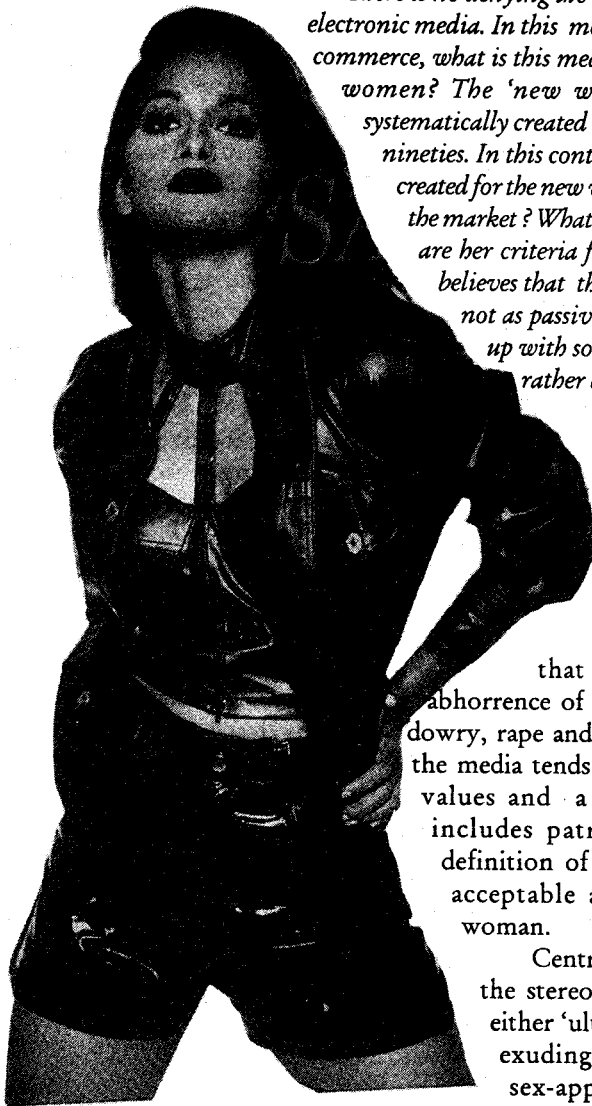


THE NEW GODDESS OF THE SKIES

WOMEN IN MEDIA

AKHILA SIVADAS

There is no denying the role of commerce in the electronic media. In this melee of small screen and commerce, what is this medium's implications for women? The 'new woman' is a creature systematically created to suit the flavour of the nineties. In this context, is the market being created for the new woman or is she creating the market? What are her values and what are her criteria for success? The author believes that the 'soap' saga in India is not as passive as it seems and comes up with some very perceptive and rather disturbing revelations.



The Media depicts and represents women in all kinds of ways. Much of the feminist debate around this issue stems from the fact that notwithstanding its abhorrence of indecent acts such as dowry, rape and violence on women, the media tends to uphold dominant values and a social ethos which includes patriarchy and a male definition of what constitutes an acceptable and even successful woman.

Central to this problem is the stereotyping of woman as either 'ultra-modern' vampish, exuding feminine wiles and sex-appeal, or as 'servile', 'abject' and a non-person. She

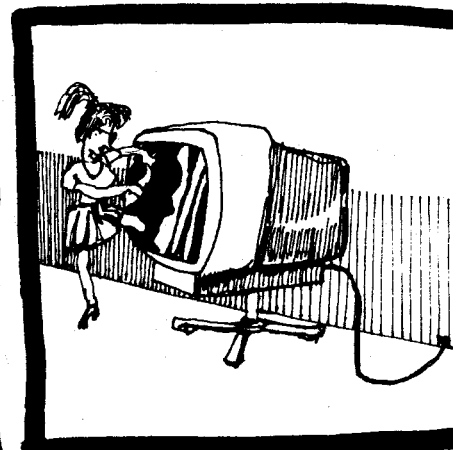
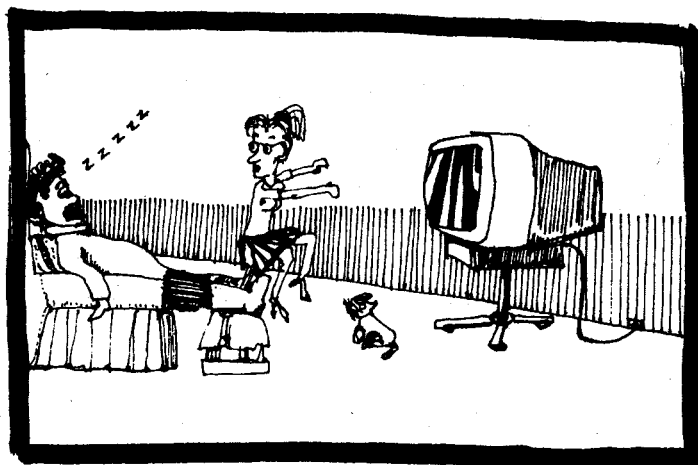
can be either the aggressor or the perennial victim. Ideally speaking, she must occupy the either/or position and hence can be dismembered physically, emotionally and intellectually. The casualty is obvious. She is denied the complexity that is due to her as a person both in relation to herself and to others.

Even more critical to the imagery, best epitomised by advertisements, is that of ideal domesticity, surreal beauty, elegance and perfection. Traits that are regarded as 'natural' to women and therefore legitimately projected and even celebrated. A construction of female and male sexuality is all pervasive, be it in ads or soaps based on pulp-fiction. While this critical framework (enunciated brilliantly by Vimal Balasubrahmanyam as early as 1988, in her pioneering work, *Mirror Image - The Media and the Women's Question*) continues to influence present day debates on the issue of media and the portrayal of women, we also have to deal with the new reality.

With the ground reality having changed very perceptibly in terms of economy, polity and more specifically, in the structure of media and its all-pervasive presence in civil society, we cannot afford to empathise with the conclusion that given its limitations, the media cannot serve as an instrument to create and sustain changes. Moreover there are new quandaries. This was best illustrated in an interaction that the Media Advocacy Group (MAG) had with a group of young counsellors who are part of a professional team that is managing a helpline on sexuality. When asked about what were their gut impressions on issues that were covered in the weekend supplements of two newspapers that they had scanned for about a fortnight, their insight was interesting. They said, "Lots on sex and interestingly, lots on male sexual disorders and the changing equation between women and men with the former not only entering the public sphere but now even making a difference to it".

So are we claiming that there is a distinct shift in the portrayal of women? Again the

**So is this
'new woman'
a commercial
gimmick
or a
phenomena
that was
bound to
arrive in the
90s?**



Will the media packaging of the woman as a liberated superperson actually stop people from noticing, let alone responding to, the plight of poor women who are denied even minimum wages and basic survival needs?

quandary was very well articulated by Kalpana Sharma, a senior journalist of *The Hindu*. She writes how there was 'a time long ago when it was difficult to sell an editor the idea of printing an article to coincide with the International Women's Day... what was an exception has become the rule today'. Much to her surprise, the 'March 9th, Sunday edition of most mainstream English newspapers was replete with articles about women'.

But what was more interesting was her observations about the nature of coverage. The 'new woman is coming out of our ears' she exclaims. Not only are they empowered and the men disempowered but this has triggered off, what she in a tongue-in-cheek manner states, a 'post-feminist trauma in an entire generation of Indian males'.

Having expressed her lack of conviction in the gender agenda of the media, she finally wonders whether this media packaging of woman as a *liberated superperson* will actually stop people from noticing, let alone responding to, the plight of poor women who are denied even minimum wages and basic survival needs.

In a sense what emerges is the fact that we need to understand and determine this change not only in print but more vitally, on television bearing in mind the inevitable cross-media influence. Does this 'new woman' really exist? If she is a 'media creation' then what has been the audience response to this changing imagery?

A similar discourse has started on the changing representation of women in popular cinema. Much of this has been based on the plea that the existing discourse on feminist film theory needs to look at this process in more 'complex' ways than what a simple theory of the 'male gaze' allows for. In particular, the discourse should deal with the complex mechanism of audience response and participation.

However, it is interesting to trace the kind of changes that are taking place with the coming of satellite and commercial television and its impact not merely on state-owned television

(Doordarshan) but also on radio and print. The channel managers on television are virtually the official storm troopers of the industry and what started five years ago as a war between Doordarshan and cable TV is today, a multi-channel struggle for supremacy, especially over software rights.

The dispute around software includes specific programmes, formats, agencies, anchors and even the *dramatis personae*. In this climate of establishing channel supremacy it is not surprising that Mr. Ratikant Basu has taken over to Star Plus the entire programming that he had built and nurtured in Doordarshan. He also took with him, key managers and commissioning editors and is seeking to build viewers' and advertisers' confidence through tried and tested means.

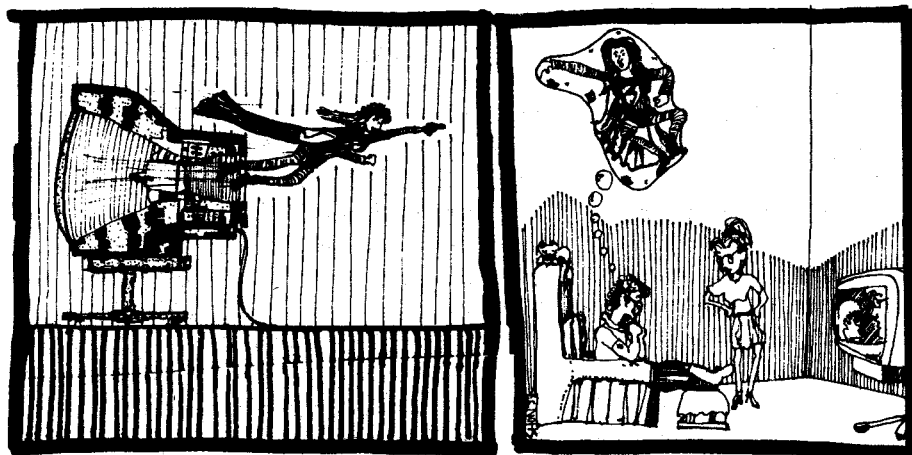
But then the logical question is, what has all this to do with women's depiction and representation on the media, more than what is apparent to us? With the advent of a private channel like Zee, four years ago, the overriding influence of market on programming became evident. The immediate strategy was to create a mass of cheap but popular software based on existing footage from commercial films. Channels used this phase to commission soaps and serials, a more ideal fare for the television medium.

Besides ensuring family viewership it also pitched at specific segments of audiences which combined viewership and the market.

The audience profile that the advertiser looks for takes into account both sex and the socio-economic factor. This includes income, age, profession, and education – a scheme which gets carefully and literally translated into media content, form and style.

A close examination reveals a very deliberate and systematic approach not only in terms of demographic and socio-economic trends, but, more subtly, in terms of psyche manipulation. Therefore, while programming, it soon became obvious that the interminable soap with all its ingredients of conflict, turmoil and passion, could hook viewers and sponsors alike.

In the advertisers' parlance, this business of 'getting hooked' implies that different viewers of different categories such as A1, A2 etc. assume varying significance. But within this maze of categories, the importance of women audiences is evident. Look at the way in which advertising campaigns took shape on prime time slots and subsequently found a similar potential on the afternoon transmissions. So much so, that one software company came along and helped Doordarshan to turn the staid afternoon slot into a much coveted space. The afternoon transmission, originally intended for senior citizens, homemakers and children got





T.V. serial 'Ghutan'

'All television programming is an excuse to get a person to watch commercials and when a sponsor, Proctor and Gamble, approached us to create a vehicle for their detergent, we obviously targetted our main consumers - women' and created a 'a never-before afternoon slot.'

Central to this re-design was the 'afternoon soap'.

Adi Pocha, the conceptualiser and ad-scriptman of a popular afternoon soap *Shanti*, has been quoted in a weekly TV magazine as having stated that 'All television programming is an excuse to get a person to watch commercials and when a sponsor, Proctor and Gamble, approached us to create a vehicle for their detergent, we obviously targetted

our main consumers - women' and created a 'a never-before afternoon slot.'

Market research studies clearly prove that homemakers with modest incomes of Rs.1500 and in certain cases, around Rs. 750 are the largest target group for a great number of consumer products.

A more critical part of the exercise of 'hooking' viewers, women and men, was the need to *fashion media content itself*. Talking about this, Sutapa Sikdar, the original brainchild and script writer of the very popular serial *Banegi Apni Baat*, shared with us her experience in creating the concept. Taking us through this process she stated, "I was clearly told that I must create a teenage-centred soap. I was also told that it must not stray into the 'campus' ambience as an another production was already dealing with it. So my choice was to plot four families. I conceived of the three sets of parents *before* creating the children, but in the fourth, I reversed the process. I created a single girl child, made her very central to the story and tried to create appropriate parents for her."

Having charted this family and friendship tree, she went about fleshing them out, giving each character distinct attitudinal and psychological attributes. But, unfortunately, there was no multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious plurality, and a very homogenous, urban, North Indian Punjabi ambience was created. Even more blatant was the dictum that the ambience had to be unmistakably upper class, be it apartments or office space and the challenges of the single parent or widowed mother had to lie squarely out of the material realm. If not, she was told, it would upset the packaging of the programme, presumably for the advertiser as much as the viewer.

But even more significant was the crafting of the 90's woman. A trend that was irreversibly started by the long-winding soap *Tara*. Having established the sheer excitement of female bonding and solidarity between four women in a big city, they went about

relentlessly building the saga. Inspired by her personal experience, the script writer not only spoke about their conflicts and turmoil but made a deliberate bid to project the 'new woman'. Their struggle was not only against discrimination or oppression. It was about exercising choices. This ranged from everyday commitments such as parenting, to very dramatic and implausible situations relating to the world of crime, work and business. Conflicts were not merely verbal disagreements and differences of opinion but ended in violent clashes.

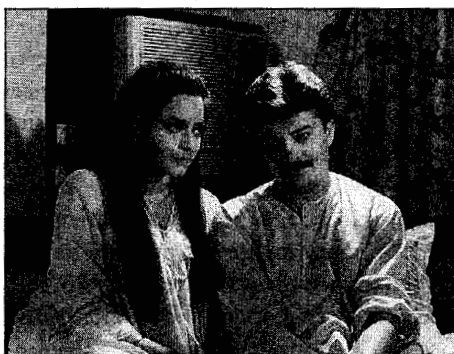
The conflicts were not only within the family but also in the professional world, not only between men and women but also between old and young. In the latter case, the conflict was not a classic case of a generation gap based on a different value system, but one which emerged from conflicting choices and options. In this connection it is interesting to observe how the social matrix was crafted. The data based on monitoring over 100 hours of soaps on channels such as Zee and Doordarshan reveals that the programming emphasis given to certain groups based on age, class, culture and lifestyle is incumbent on the larger concerns of the soap creators. It is no accident, therefore, that the lead characters of these soaps, both men and women, are young, or at most, early middle aged and can be slotted predominantly in the age group 20 to 35, with the next group between 35 to 50 getting a lesser but a critical representation.

This, in turn, influences family structures and relationships. It is largely nuclear with a sizeable proportion of women and men single, in the process of getting married or just married. The extended family is virtually out. Even when family business brings siblings together, subsequent misunderstandings and rivalry destroy the joint family. In fact, business associates, colleagues and friends are preferred. On the professional front, it is vital that they are at the peak of professional ambition and zeal. This is common to both women and men.

Despite the continuing differences between genders in terms of the range of professions that they are involved in, it is interesting to note that the kind of representation that women have been given is sufficient to make a statement not only about working women but those working in highly competitive and pressured jobs. Women are depicted managing businesses, working as lawyers, journalists, fashion designers, executives in advertising agencies, public relations officers, secretaries, lecturers and doctors. Not all of them are relegated to the middle and lower echelons of the job hierarchy. Many of them have been slotted as leaders or harbouring the aspiration to get there and some even taking recourse to



T.V. serial 'Tara'



T.V. serial 'Hasratein'



T.V. serial 'Sailaab'

There is no gender agenda about women responding to conflicts in one way and men in another. On the other hand, a strong element of female retaliation and even villainy is perpetrated, and the perpetuation of the conflict is sometimes carried over to the next generation.

underhand means to be there. It is also interesting to find that even homemakers have not been put into the traditional mould. In many instances they are shown as professional confidants and as privy to many business predicaments and decisions.

Into all this social engineering is infused the story line. As stated earlier, the process of conflict-building is very basic to it. In this connection it is also very telling that this process is set in the milieu of the 90's. A milieu which is not only acutely conflict-prone but also through the process of utter disregard for existing value based norms is presumably trying to create a need for a new one. Meanwhile chaos reigns and much of this gets reflected on media through unbridled violence, volatile passion and outright candidness.

Therefore, it is not surprising that it is touching audiences and even making a difference to their lives. "Ever since the soap, *Ghutan* began in Doordarshan, my daughter has become very conscious of her father's treatment of me", stated a middle class homemaker of Sarojini Nagar. It is interesting that what has triggered off this reaction is the fact that the soap depicts a daughter who has taken up cudgels on behalf of her mother and is determined to fight male domination.

In this context it is significant that this 'new woman', hegemonic and powerful, has no intention of coming to terms with violence. When almost 151 out of a total of 210 episodes that we monitored depicted all manner of violence which accounts for 72.3 % of the episodes, it is clear that we are really dealing with a virtual barrage of it. The most visible form of violence is, of course, verbal violence, followed by threatening postures, a menacing push or shove and even psychological torture. Some of this depiction has to do perhaps, with the limitation of the medium. Unlike cinema, it cannot be action-packed.

Therefore, in order to keep it volatile, verbal violence is used in a more concentrated form. Harsh words are strung together in hate-filled speeches and quite revealingly, women, men and to an extent, children are involved in these brutal exchanges. And often, given the nature of this medium, a person to person altercation and the action around it can prove very compelling and absorbing.

In the case of women and men, although the male continues to be the archetypal aggressor subjugating both fellow males as well as women, it is no more a one-sided saga. As against 121 incidents or 34.4 % of male aggression

on women and 154 incidents or 43.8 % against other men, women have been depicted in 33 incidents or 9.4 % cases of mounting an aggression on men and 42 incidents or 11.9 % on fellow-women. Of the four channels we monitored, Zee TV earns the unique distinction of virtually topping the table depicting the highest percentage of violence on screen followed by DD Metro, Sun TV and finally by DD 1.

Zee serials like *Andaz* which features a female villain and *Campus* have made violence so integral to the story line that hardly any episodes can go by without projecting extremely violent conflicts. It encompasses within it all shades of conflict - between men in business and love, between man and woman, between women at home, such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and between women in love triangles.

While in the case of men, the stereotype of a macho male has been used liberally and viewers are privy to different facets of their personality, the female villain, Urmila is a one-dimensional being who takes sadistic pleasure in playing the men against each other and along with them their women be it sister, mother or lover. Similarly, Devyani, a leading young protagonist of the serial *Tara* finds herself fighting a gruesome business war with her male rivals. Not only does she use every business trick in the book to outwit her rivals but in fact promotes sexual violence very ingeniously by sleeping with her enemy.

Therefore, despite all the disparity in numbers about male and female aggression, it is clear that they are not interested in depicting women as peace loving or emotionally strong and mature. In fact, there is no gender agenda about women responding to conflicts in one way and men in another. On the other hand, a strong element of female retaliation and even villainy is perpetrated, and the perpetuation of the conflict is sometimes carried over to the next generation.

However, it is the audience engagement with this changing image that is most revealing. All of them chose their protagonist. If they had got hooked to Priya of *Imtihan*, then it was a case of unswerving loyalty to her, and the same was for Tara or Devyani in the serial *Tara* or *Shanti*.

The reasons: On Priya of *Imtihan*, they said, "Priya is very strong...she does what she wants but not against herself. She is emotionally strong and has a lot of self respect and determination. She is able to cope with her problems". On Devyani of *Tara* they said, "Although she is a very hard person, devoid of any emotions, we appreciate her ability to take her own decisions". On the portrayal of Shanti it was felt that ideally speaking, they would "like to see such women in reality".

But they were not devoid of misgivings.



TYEB MEHTA

was the fact that while they felt that many of the protagonists made many valid statements on marriage, relationship with men, biased social pressures and even questioned the basic issue of sharing responsibilities and work, they failed to appreciate the eccentric attributes that powerful women are given and the kind of personal consequences that these women are forced to deal with.

Here, the familiar stereotyping manifests itself not as an exception but as a rule across the board. Elaborating on this, one of the viewers lamented that "they are seen as home wreckers, divorcees, incompetent parents (with children suffering from alcoholism, drug abuse and even prostitution) and often failures as people, seeking numerous sexual relationships". Another characteristic of a successful woman that they resented is the fact that "she is manipulative, using feminine wiles to enhance her professional growth". There is also an apprehension that, "...in general we find that whenever a 'modern' or 'working woman' is projected..... she is shown as a house breaker, separated in marriage and with children addicted to drugs and alcohol etc" and whether this has to do with evoking and reinforcing the male bias.

So is this 'new woman' a commercial gimmick or a phenomena that was bound to arrive in the 90s? Has this so-called 'gimmick' anything to do with the fact that the generation of the sixties and seventies, belonging to the urban middle class of big cities have 'arrived' in the 90s? Are their successes and predicaments being represented on the small screen? Obviously their lives hold great interest for other sections of society but it would be interesting to fathom what they make of it.

These are some of the issues that media researchers will have to address to understand the complex relationship between the media and its audiences.

Akhila Sivadas taught at St. Ann's College for women in Hyderabad. In 1992 she held a national level workshop on Women and Media which led to the creation of the Media Advocacy Group of which she remains the co-ordinator till date. She was the Editorial Consultant for a women's news magazine programme on Doordarshan called Sampark. Under her direction, MAG created a women and media network in the three metros - Bangalore, Mumbai and Calcutta. Akhila lives in New Delhi.

*Photos: Courtesy Akhila Sivadas
Illustrations: Shounak Ray*

MEDIA ADVOCACY GROUP (MAG)

The Media Advocacy Group is an organisation of media professionals and researchers in development and communication in order to advocate a consistent gender perspective in mainstream media.

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Activities of the MAG

- * Media monitoring
- * Workshops and seminars
- * Research and publications
- * Advocacy and lobbying
- * Audience research

Viewers Forum

The major objective of this forum is to make viewers pro-active and act as a citizen's collective in their relationship with media rather than relating to it as disparate groups and individuals. We do hope that the readers of THE EYE will immediately get in touch with us.

Themes for the forthcoming issues of THE EYE

We invite our readers and others to send us articles for the following:

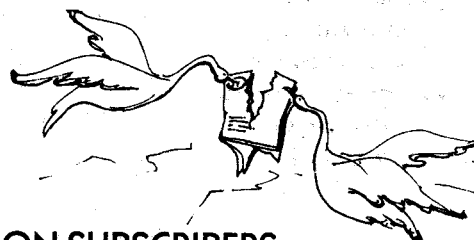
- ▶ Governance
- ▶ Pluralism
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Environment
- ▶ Sacred India
- ▶ Non-violence

For explanations, please refer to page 3.

We are looking for originality of thought expressed in excellent language.

Remember that THE EYE is a magazine of inspiration not information.

The editor's decision will be final.



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S.K.GUHA

The State Response to the Challenge of Gender

The Constitution of India, it appears, has been drafted after considerable thought to the gender question. The 'engendering' agenda of the Government has been channelised through the legal and the legislative, the policy and the programmatic, the institutional and the political. State Commissions for Women have been set up in the states to monitor these. There have been Committees and Five Year Plans and any number of 'super-structures'. The women's movement has become increasingly critical of the way that the Constitution has been made a mockery of in the development process. But the real question to be asked on the fiftieth year of independence is, are we only dealing with women's development or women's empowerment? The author, an LAS officer analyses the problem.



Like the many contrasts that Indian history and culture mirror, the attitude to women has been characterised by ambivalence, strange nuances and sometimes dramatic paradoxes. The woman has been worshipped as Goddess and described as the very embodiment of power (as *Shakti*) and almost at the same time disempowered in myriad ways and ignored whether in folklore or myth. She has been venerated as Sita and at the next moment banished for failing to live up to a set of patriarchal male values; she has been made into an icon of learning as Saraswati and systematically denied even basic education as a girl child. Coming to the present day, we have had laws which are far ahead of their times; we have had policies and international postures which are radical even by international standards, while the sex ratio continues to plunge perilously, the finest examples of engendering affirmative action co-exist with dowry deaths and child marriage.

Having said this, it must be emphasised, however, that there are definite limits, ideological and philosophical, within which even the occasional flashes of sensitivity whether in

action or rhetoric or attitude have remained restricted. The understanding of gender as a socialisation process wherein gender differences invariably get translated into unequal power sharing, the iniquitous division of labour and responsibilities and the skewed distribution of resources and access to services is quite new to Indian politics. In modern gender terminology, concern and sensitivity has generally been restricted to an appreciation of women's immediate needs as opposed to the strategic needs and at best have had a liberal democratic premise that no person should be considered inferior to another. As Radha Kumar says, the early 19th century reformers felt it was these differences that made women socially useful as mothers and carers and hence the social need for their protection. Therefore, till relatively recent times no real attempt was seen to have been made to challenge the social, economic and political constructions of gender. Equal property rights for women, sharing of housework and child caring responsibilities with men and questioning of the institutional exclusion of women from decision making structures have not become major issues of political discourse.

The beginnings of the women's movement which is today known for its vibrancy, diversity and richness of character can be traced to the social reform movements of the nineteenth century mainly in Bengal and Maharashtra. Although largely led by men social reformers, women also were drawn into them as wives, sisters and mothers. The 'gendered' position of women as mothers and by extension, mothers of the nation was used as a rallying point of men and women around movements for women's rights. The early 20th century saw the involvement of a large number of women in nationalist struggles and organisations. This period also saw the emergence of a number of women's organisations such as the Women's Indian Association, Young Women's Christian Association and the All India Women's Conference which took up the struggle for women's rights, becoming the precursor of the contemporary women's movement. In post-independence India, the movement was firmly grounded on the principles of gender equality and the assertion that the roots of subordination and oppression lay in the gender construct of society which gender based structures and division of labour perpetuated. This was a major concept and has since, constituted a strain of commonality in the women's movement which has otherwise been very diverse in terms of focus and cuts across regions and classes.

The Indian Constitution was drafted before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but was adopted at a time when the deliberations for the Universal Declaration were

In modern gender terminology, concern and sensitivity has generally been restricted to an appreciation of women's immediate needs as opposed to the strategic needs and at best have had a liberal democratic premise that no person should be considered inferior to another.



(Top) Goddess Durga just before immersion. (Below) Disempowerment through the purdah. The woman has been worshipped as Goddess and at the same time disempowered in a myriad ways and ignored whether in folklore or myth.

therefore strongly influenced by the latter. The principle of gender equality and the elimination of gender based discrimination are amongst the fundamentals of the constitutional edifice of India. It comprehends equality before law and equal protection of the law, prohibition of discrimination and equality of opportunity in matter of public employment. These are justifiable claims and can be redressed through the writ jurisdiction of the High Courts and the Supreme Court of India. The Constitution further empowers the State to adopt methods of positive discrimination or affirmative action in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative discriminations and deprivations that women face. The Constitution also contains certain provisions, called Directive Principles, which lay down the framework for securing justice: social, economic and political which the Preamble to the Constitution asserts. They enjoin upon the State *inter alia* to secure the right to adequate means of livelihood for both men and women, equally; free and compulsory primary education; equal pay for equal work for both men and women; the health and strength of workers, for both men and women; and ensuring that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age and strength. Further a duty is cast on every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

The response of the government for making this constitutional promise a reality can be seen at essentially four levels: the legal and legislative, the policy and programmatic, the institutional and the political. the ideological and conceptual trajectory that each of them have followed have not always been uniform. While the legal and legislative interventions have been based on the Constitutional premises of gender equality and non-discrimination right from the start, the plan

and policy initiatives have been more evolutionary in nature. the rationale for most institutional initiatives have again been based on the fundamentals of gender equality right from the start, whereas the political and administrative ones have been much less engendered. This is again a reflection of the ambivalence with reference to gender which has characterised thinking and action in India through the ages.

LEGISLATION

Legislation has been the mainstay of India's efforts to secure gender equality and the struggle for legal equality has also been one of the major concerns of the women's movement. The State has enacted various laws to realise the Constitutional mandate. Amendments are periodically carried out to keep pace with emerging demands.

In fact, the large participation of women in India's freedom struggle paved the way for some very progressive legislation right from the dawn of independence. Several important legislations were passed during the early years to ensure equal rights to women, particularly Hindu women. These related to the age of marriage, monogamy, equal property rights for men and women, giving women the right to adopt a child and making the consent of the wife compulsory for the adoption of a child by a married man (Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Hindu Succession Act, 1956, etc. Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956). The Hindu Personal Law, Christian Personal Law and Parsee Personal Law were overhauled to give women greater rights regarding inheritance, adoption and divorce. Monogamy was made mandatory. However, personal law has remained unchanged on the basis of a policy that the demand for such changes must come from within the communities themselves before the State can intervene. Whereas this policy did lead to changes in some personal laws, it had acted as the main obstacle to a uniform civil code.

The State has also enacted a number of protective and regulatory legislation in the sphere of employment both in the organised and unorganised sectors. These relate to remuneration, conditions of work, collective bargaining, child care facilities, etc. The passing of laws however is no guarantee for enforcement. The enforcement of these laws have been largely limited to the organised sector.

To ensure that these legal safeguards actually reach women, government has enacted the National Commission for Women Act 1990, through an act of Parliament, creating a statutory National Commission to oversee the working of constitutional and legal safeguards for women, to take up individual cases of violation on a selective basis and reviewing laws and rules to ensure that they don't discriminate against women in any way. The Act makes it mandatory for the government to place the annual reports containing recommendations of the Commission in Parliament with a 'action-taken' report and reasons for not taking action on recommendations if any.

Several States of India have set up similar State Commissions for Women to act as

ombudsmen for women in the States. A total of nine states have set up State Commissions, in addition to the National Commission.

The notion of affirmative action or positive discrimination in favour of women is not only an essential feature of Indian political thinking since independence, but it derives from

There is also a proposal under the consideration of Government, for bringing about a minimum reservation for women in public employment. This, however, is now being examined in the light of Article 16 of the Constitution which specifically prohibits discrimination with respect to opportunity of public employment except in case of categories of classes of disadvantaged people.

POLICIES, PLANS AND INSTITUTIONS

FIVE YEAR PLANS

The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) viewed women's issues primarily as a social one and that too within a welfare context only. However, even within this approach, emphasis was laid on the strategy of organisation building and encouraging grass roots voluntary organisations to work for women's welfare in partnership with Government. The Central Social Welfare Board and State Social welfare boards were the result. The Second Plan (1956-61) continued the same approach. Mahila Mandals were created to ensure better implementation. During the Third, Fourth and other Interim Plans (1961-74), while some priority was accorded to women's education, the issues of population and family planning gradually acquired importance. The Fifth Plan (1974-79) enlarged the scope of social welfare to cope with several problems of the family and the role of women. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) which is today one of the world's largest child development/nutrition intervention, was started during the Fifth Plan.

Meanwhile, after an almost three decade lull, the women's movement became increasingly critical of the way the Constitutional mandate of 'equality between the sexes' had been made a mockery of in the development process. In response, the

Government set up the Committee on the Status of Women. The Committee critiqued the failure of the Plans to address the issues of discrimination, to acknowledge and to take account, the contribution of millions of women to the economy, their livelihood issues and their marginalization. Preparations for the Nairobi conference and the deliberations at Nairobi also influenced thinking. The conceptual thinking that slowly crystallised within the women's movement was that women's needs were holistic and multidimensional: cutting across economic, social and political sectors. The operational strategy envisaged mainstreaming women's concerns across sectors by earmarking a share of various sectoral allocations for women rather than limiting interventions within women specific programmes.

In some sense, the Sixth Plan (1980-85) made a major break. Women's development was

what is essentially an enabling clause in the Constitution itself. Article 15 (3) of the Constitution thus lays down that special measures in favour of women and children will not be construed as violative of the principle of equality. Having said this, the Constitution, however, prohibits in Article 16, any discrimination with respect to opportunity of public employment except in case of categories or classes of disadvantaged people.

The State used this enabling clause of the Constitution to bring about a major amendment whereby reservation of seats for women in all institutions of local governance has become a Constitutional mandate. Under these amendments, one third of all elected seats in the Panchayats (local Government bodies in rural areas) and Municipalities will be reserved for women. Further, one-third of posts of chairpersons of these bodies will also be reserved for women. Through these provisions, a quiet revolution is in its making. Elections under the new provisions are mandatory in all the states of the country. In several states, where these elections have already been held, women have won over 40 % of all seats. By a conservative estimate, once all elections are held, around one million women in rural areas alone, will be entering public office.

The proposed 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill promises to be one of the most historic applications of this principle of affirmative action in which one third of all seats in Parliament and State Legislatures may be reserved for women.

During the Third, Fourth and other interim Plans, the issues of population and family planning gradually acquired importance.



Women labourers in the unorganised sector. The passing of laws is no guarantee for enforcement. The enforcement of these laws have been largely limited to the organised sector.

After an almost three decade lull the women's movement became increasingly critical of the way the Constitutional mandate of 'equality between the sexes' had been made a mockery of in the development process. In response the Government set up the Committee on the Status of Women.

recognised as a development sector and a separate chapter was included in the Plan document for the first time. The Sixth Plan sought to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach with a three pronged thrust on health, education and employment. Although the emphasis was on family centred poverty alleviation strategies, the Plan declared that in cases of transferred assets such as agricultural and homestead land the endeavour would be to provide joint titles to husband and wife. In the meantime Government started a number of women specific schemes like the Working Women's Hostels Scheme, the Short Stay Home scheme and most notably the Development Programme for Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA). An innovative scheme of Science and Technology for Women was started by the Department of Science and Technology. This approach continued into the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90). A major institutional development during this time was the setting up of a separate Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development as the national machinery for Women.

A significant response of the Government which characterised this shift from welfare to development was a strategy of extending the Constitutional provision of affirmative action even to the economic sphere at schematic and programme levels. What was started by the Ministry of Rural Development through the

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Nehru Rozgar Yojana etc. The emphasis of the Eighth Plan was a concern to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women.

The formation of the National Commission for Women as an act of Parliament and State Commissions for Women was a major institutional development during this process. As explained earlier, this act also sought to build in a system of legislative review of gender issues. During the Eighth Plan period, several state governments formulated women's policies and amended the Hindu Succession Act to give women equal rights. The STEP (Support for Training and Self Employment of Women) programme which was started during the Seventh Plan was expanded during the Eighth Plan to cover most of the states. The sectors included were dairy, sericulture, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts and agriculture where women predominate. The strategy involved an integrated set of interventions including awareness generation, mobilisation, organisation building, skill training, marketing support, involvement in decision making, access to and control over resources and factors of production, quality control etc. The Agriculture Ministry started a pilot scheme of Women In Agriculture in seven states to give women cultivators access to agricultural extension and technology. Women's Development Corporation was set up in a number of states for the purposes of assisting women's groups seeking economic empowerment. A unique process of mobilisation of women had been started in the Seventh Plan through the process of the Total Literacy Campaign which enlisted hundreds and thousands of poor women. The Government for the first time started an Alternative Credit Scheme (Rashtriya Mahila Kosh) for women with low transaction costs relying on mediation by NGOs and self-help groups with peer group pressure acting as the only collateral. This process of collective investment in groups of women through the anti-poverty programmes, STEP, Total Literacy Campaign etc. combined with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have prepared the grounds for a unique level of participation and empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT

At the individual level Indian politics has never failed to give esteem and status to women who have reached positions of power and influence probably much before the West grudgingly did so. However, the ambivalence to gender does not cease. All the protestations of gender equality have not helped so far to



Women contributing to the economy. They cut across all economic, social and political sectors.

earmarking of a 30 % quota for women in the TRYSEM (Training Programme for Rural Youth in Self Employment) soon, especially during the Eighth Plan (1992-97), got established as a Government policy i.e., the reserving of minimum physical and financial quotas for women in all anti-poverty programmes like the

overcome institutionalised subordination and marginalization. Even during the 1996 general elections when almost every political party had made promises about women's empowerment in their manifestos, the number of women candidates sponsored was one of the lowest.

The run up to the Beijing Conference and the series of consultations involving women's groups from the grassroots, sometimes even without intermediary NGOs, provided the necessary synergy for initiating a momentum towards the erosion of the culture of silence and social invisibility: the twin pillars of patriarchy. The nation wide ferment over the proposed 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill is a logical culmination of this process.



Is there some hope for the culture of silence and social invisibility?

RAGHU RAI - TOI

A particular concern during the Eighth Plan period has been the impact of the structural adjustment processes on women through expenditure compression especially in the social sectors and doubts on whether the large mass of women, given their low levels of skills including negotiating skills, limited access to technology, land and other resources and lack of say in the development process, will be able to reap the benefits which the liberalisation process might create. The Government has recently created a National Consultative Committee to oversee and study the impact of these processes on women in different sectors.

The declining sex ratio particularly in the age group of 0-6 years and the increasing incidence of female infanticide and foeticide are also causing concern. A number of states have started special incentive schemes aimed at families with girl children. Their impact however is not yet known to be significant. The Government has proposed to start a scheme of establishing institutions at the district, state and national levels called Commissioners for Women's Rights which would act as public defenders of women's rights against gender based violence.

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women currently awaiting approval proposes to institutionalise the process of empowerment through affirmative action to raise women's participation to a critical mass in all decision making structures and processes, gender analysis to incorporate women's concerns and perspectives across sectors, review of all laws and procedures from a gender perspective, elimination of the feminisation of poverty,

The process of political empowerment, mobilisation and the synergy between the women's movement and the processes of governance provide the most abiding hope for the future.

mobilisation and organisation of women, getting all Departments, Ministries and State governments to identify the flow of benefits to women through their plans and programmes etc. The policy declares that all data will be gender disaggregated and it proposes the development of Gender Development Indices at National, state and district levels. Pilot studies are already under way in this regard. It calls for the creation of a National Committee to monitor the implementation of the Policy.

The Approach Paper to the Ninth Five Year Plan seeks to articulate the policy shift from women's development to women's empowerment. Although it continues to situate women along with 'other vulnerable sections', it identifies the empowerment of women as a Plan objective. It also calls for a women's component plan within every development sector, something that the women's movement had demanded as an operational strategy during the 70's.

s. The Approach Paper further proposes the preparation and implementation of the women's component plan through the programme mode of the Indira Mahila Yojana which basically seeks to organise women into groups (to be registered) through which to help women to access services and to whom all functionaries will eventually be accountable at different levels. These groups will also be federated at block levels. The Approach Paper declares the control of social infrastructure by women's groups and the fostering of self help groups as an operational and strategic objective.

UNIFEM in collaboration with UNFPA and a few bilaterals is currently supporting a process through which the micro-voices of women can be linked to and heard across the macro-processes of planning. A think-tank of some of the most distinguished representatives of the women's movement is orchestrating this entire process of mobilisation and articulation of women's perspectives from the grassroot levels in tandem

with the formal planning stages within the government and Planning Commission in an attempt to engender the last plan of this century.

The challenge, however lies in mainstreaming this concern across the thinking of all Departments and sectors without any lingering nuance or ambivalence. The process of political empowerment, mobilisation and the synergy between the women's movement and the processes of governance provide the most abiding hope for the future. The most difficult of all tasks is to ensure that gender is not superficially added to a predetermined set of priorities, but that gender becomes part of the operating assumptions and parameters based on which women and men plan and organise their lives.

Mr S.K. Guha an I.A.S. officer, has held the post of Joint Secretary of Department of Women and Child Development. He was the country focal point in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. His particular interest lies in the field of developmental issues related to gender and child rights. He is currently with the UNIFEM.

WOMEN AND THE PANCHAYATS

LESSONS OF EMPOWERMENT IN MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh presents an unusual paradigm of development in terms of many indicators of development – low women's literacy, adverse sex ratio, high poverty ratio, and high maternal and infant mortality. The state political leadership is trying its best to reverse these trends by involving people and women in particular. It is in this context that the efforts of the state leadership in M.P to involve women in panchayats both as a method of grass roots governance and also to empower them has to be seen.

Nearly 1.8 lakhs of women, today, in different tiers of the panchayats (*zilla, janpad* and *gram*) are participating and learning to rule and make a difference to their lives and the lives of their communities. Cynics of the *panchayati raj*, are quick to snub the whole idea of women in panchayats as something of a joke and the men folk in these panchayats are always ready to treat them as 'behans' (sisters), who can be silenced easily by intimidation.

Before we analyse the experience of M.P we need to understand the whole issue of local and grass roots governance. How is local governance different from state and national governance? How and why is governance through the *panchayati raj* system better than remote controlled state and central level governance? Are people more involved in grassroots governance or in state-centered governance? Are wisdom-based, simple and rustic people better suited for grassroots governance than the more street smart politicians of the state Vidhan Sabhas and national Lok and Rajya Sabhas? Is direct democracy through voting once in five years and sending representatives really helping the redressal of peoples' problems or are people-centered panchayats better suited to run local level establishments (like Swiss Cantons)?

Women's role in panchayats is not just the problem of M.P but the whole country. The best way to highlight the difference between panchayat governance and state/national governance is to identify their main characteristics, especially that of the leadership in both cases:



S.N.	State Vidhan Sabha, National Lok Sabha Leaders	Zilla/Janpad/ Gram Panchayat Leaders
1.	Concerned more with one time vote catching. Once in 5 year appearance before their voters.	Have to be visible always to the voters round the year.
2.	Busy more with drafting, debating laws and policy making.	Concerned with actual implementation of laws.
3.	Tendency towards favouring a few and selected party men. Party-affiliation strong.	Less party affiliation and more concerned with local groups.
4.	Less transparent to the local voters and people. More secret dealings.	Forced to be transparent all the time. Cannot hide from the public gaze.
5.	Can conveniently hide the assets /wealth. Voters are not able to see the wealth accumulation. Tendency towards capital accumulation.	Cannot hide the wealth made during the tenure. Fixed assets always visible to the local people.
6.	Tendency to bluff local people since they cannot verify the facts and assertions.	Cannot bluff local people. Assurances verifiable locally.
7.	More concerned with National State level resources, funds than with local resources. Not accountable to local resources/environmental resources.	More concerned with local resources /local environmental problems.
8.	Survives more on assurances than on finding solutions.	Cannot afford to live on assurances. Has to find local solutions for local problems.
9.	Can do anything in the name of Public/voters interest without telling the voters.	Cannot do anything in the name of public interest- only local interest reigns.



MANU KULKARNI

A gram sabha session in Betul District listening to the resolutions passed in the sabha.

Cynics of the panchayati raj, are quick to snub the whole idea of women in panchayats as something of a joke and the men folk in these panchayats are always ready to treat them as 'behans' (sisters), who can be silenced easily by intimidation.

Direct democracy all over the world is now being termed as part-time democracy. Says the *Economist*, 'In most of the democracies the voice of the people is only heard once every few years, in elections, in which the voters choose the President or send their representatives to an elected parliament and that between those elections, (five or seven years), it is the President or the parliamentarians who do all the deciding, while the rest of the democracy is expected to stand more or less quietly on one side, either nodding its head in irrelevant approval or growling in frustrated disagreement.' Swiss Cantons are almost like our panchayats. Kilchberg is a Canton of 7,000 people. It raises its own income and property taxes, runs a school upto the age of sixteen, appoints teachers, disburses old age pension, runs its own fire brigade, maintains its police force and does everything that a modern state government in India does. People are so honest in Kilchberg that if the fruit seller is out for lunch, you just leave your money on the counter! The government in Kilchberg consists of a seven person council, elected by 7000 people which supervises a modest staff of professionals. The real power is wielded by the voters who assemble upto four times a year to listen to the Council's recommendation and decide whether it is handling things properly. It is at these meetings that tax levels are fixed, new laws are passed, and anything else anybody wants to bring up discussed. Voting is by show

of hands but there can be a cross on paper vote if a third of those present demand it. If somebody feels the Council's ideas are useless, he or she can, by collecting fifteen signatures, insist on putting a proposed new law to the voters. This is *real* direct, grassroots democracy.

Cynics now will say, "Oh this happens in Switzerland and not in an Indian panchayat. It cannot happen here." Yes it cannot happen in an Indian panchayat because we do not want it to happen! State MLAs, ministers and bureaucrats do not want to part with the powers of hiring and firing school teachers, auxiliary nurse midwives and village *patwaris*. *Gram sabhas* in Indian panchayats are in no way different from Swiss Cantonal meetings.

I have attended several *gram sabha* meetings in M.P and found that a rustic and illiterate man or woman has more earthly wisdom than any of our MLAs and MPs and can ask intelligent questions on governance. They can grill the village panchayat *Pradhan*. But at present, they are not allowed to take simple decisions on village water supply systems or punish an absentee school teacher. Take the case of the Local Area Development Scheme in India where an M.P gets Rs 1 crore to spend as he/she likes in their political constituency. The activities allowed are construction of school buildings, health centers, *anganwadi* centers etc. Aren't these matters better left to the decision of village panchayats? Why should an M.P be given powers

"Men have ghunghats too", says a panchayat lady from Betul dist. "Men have closed minds (purdah-mind) and they can never lift their mental-veils, while women can lift or remove their veils easily, and speak with feelings."



Veiled identity - removal of the ghunghat is one of the first steps towards empowerment.

on these? An M.P is supposed to think of policies and law-making and not be worried about village roads, hand pumps and school buildings. This is usurping the power of the panchayats. Similarly, state MLAs are given discretionary powers to spend money in their constituency. All this shows that we believe more in indirect rather than direct democracy. Naturally *panchayati raj* can never succeed in Indian soil.

Where do women fit into this scenario? The present controversy on reservation of seats for women in parliament and state assemblies makes little sense in the context of direct democracy. If we want to build grassroots and direct democracy, panchayats are the best instruments. Women in panchayats can make an enormous difference to the solution of local problems like water supply, sanitation, health, education, ecology and the environment. Women at the local level can be powerful leaders and once they graduate from the local level, they can outshine any male leader at the state and national level. It is in this context that we have to view the present debate on the magical figure of 33 % reservation for women at the state and national levels. Some states, like Madhya Pradesh, have now encouraged women in large numbers, to represent their village communities in local panchayats. However, two years is just too short a time to pass any judgment on how well they can do, given the opportunity, at the state and national levels. In this period of the *panchayati raj* governance in M.P, despite the hurdles in the form of state politicians and bureaucrats, women have played a dominant role in improving the lives of their communities.

The Women's Empowering process in Madhya Pradesh (Ghunghat Ka Janjhat and Sarpanch Pati syndrome)

When in 1994, for the first time, thousands of women in M.P got into panchayats, their first obstacle was their *ghunghats* (veils that covered their faces) and made eye contact with the panchayat *karmis* (workers) impossible. Many women panchayat members, fresh from their homes, were a little afraid of lifting their veils and talking straight at panchayat meetings. There were several atrocities on women panchayat members in several parts of the state. The SC/ST women panchayat *Pradhans* and some Uttar Pradesh *Pradhans* were even physically abused by upper caste male *panchas*.

Massive training for women was

spearheaded by UNICEF and the M.P government in forty five districts of M.P, through the network of local NGOs, setting in motion the process of empowerment. So far, 20,000 village women panchayat members have been trained. These three-day training sessions were interactive and were organised by local NGOs known to the women *panchas* and their husbands. The first day was all anxiety and suspense. Husbands (*sarpanch patis* - SPs) were hesitant to leave their wives alone and would accompany them to training sessions. This was only natural because it was the first time that their wives ever left home. Gradually, the *ghunghats* were lifted and they felt free. After two years, when we interviewed these 'veiled' women they said, "We keep *ghunghats* only in our houses, when we come out in panchayat meetings, we remove them. We are no more worried about our veils - we know when to put them on and when to remove them". "Men have *ghunghats* too", says a panchayat lady from Betul dist. "Men have closed minds (*purdah-mind*) and they can never lift their mental-veils, while women can lift or remove their veils easily, and speak with feelings."

The second empowerment process was the liberation of panchayat 'seals'. The *sarpanch patis* carried the seals on behalf of their panchayat wives, and they misused the seals for issuing false certificates. Now the women panchayat presidents and vice-presidents have captured their seals back and are keeping them in their custody. This is slow but sure empowerment.

Women Learning to rule

The whole *panchayati raj* experiment in M.P is teaching women how to rule. Rather, how to govern has been the main theme right across the forty five districts of the state. Two trends are emerging among women panchayat members (1) issues of health, education water and sanitation, fuel wood and energy are all getting priority, because as women they have suffered, and as *sarpanchs* or *upasarpanchs* they want to solve these problems in their villages (2) Men *panchas* are more concerned with Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and other Yojanas coming from New Delhi and the state capitals. They are more concerned with buildings, roads, culverts and running a full establishment with all the attendant problems of sanctions and audits and what have you. If our concern is with human development, we should encourage more women at these local levels where peoples' problems are more acute.

Panchayat Governance and Women's Policy

Madhya Pradesh is a state where an explicit Women's Policy has been prepared and its implementation is monitored. Women in panchayats do not know as yet, in great detail,

the main features of this Policy and how it could further the cause of women. In a recently concluded panchayat women's convention, many panchayat women expressed their lack of understanding of this Policy, what it contains and what they can do. Many women have been instrumental in bringing together all the disparate programmes and schemes that have not been implemented either because of lack of political will or human inefficiency. For instance, many women panchayat members took up the task of popularising iodised salt and monitoring its sale and consumption in many villages and towns of M.P. as part of the Rajiv Gandhi Technology Mission on elimination of iodine deficiency disorders (like goiter, cretinism and other disorders). In hundreds of villages, women took up tiny iodine testing kits, tested the salt in village grocery shops and ensured the sale of only iodised salt. In Sehore District, a woman panchayat president carries the test kit in her bag all the time and keeps testing salt wherever she goes - in shops, kitchens, *anganwadis* and midday meals in schools. These invisible, but

life-saving interventions are of far greater significance in the lives of people than power stations, bridges and dams. If we want to give life to peoples' governance, then women can make a difference to that process.

Women, Panchayats, People and Pumps

Nearly three lakhs hand pumps installed by the Public Health Department of M.P. were transferred one fine day to the panchayats in the state, without any readiness on the part of these panchayats. Rs 500 was given for each hand pump towards its maintenance. India Mark II hand pumps are generally sturdy but with bad handling they can break. The entire maintenance was handled by block level mechanics and for a hundred villages there are just one or two block level mechanics. It is humanly impossible to attend to all the 2000 hand pumps in a block. Hence, training of village level mechanics, particularly women, has been a felt need. Women in Betul were trained as hand pump mechanics and the breakdown rates came down. They named each part of the India Mark II hand pump in Hindi as the following:

Plunger Rod - *Chotu Chad*
Plunger Yoke Body - *Pinjara*

Upper Value - *Mendki*
Washer - *Bucket*
Spacer - *Katori*.
Follower - *Glassi* (Like a glass)
Check Valve Body - *Badi Pinjara*
Check Valve - *Badi Mendki*
Push Rod - *Choti Kila Kanta*.
Cylinder Body - *Pyle* (measuring grain)
Head - *Peti*

Women panchayat members are always concerned with drinking water issues. Here again we find a clear difference in the pattern of thinking among men and women panchayat members. Men *sarpanchs* prefer capital intensive piped water schemes because they can have their 'margins' from contractors of the piped water supply 'Yojanas', but women demand a twenty-four hour water supply available through the hand pump. They prefer to repair these hand pumps rather than depend on one *chowkidar* who can switch off and switch on the piped-water supply electric switch. The former is more sustainable than the latter.

Next to drinking water is the sanitation problem. Women are more affected by bad sanitation than men. Hundreds of women panchayats are demanding in M.P. protected sanitary facilities like leach pit toilets which do not need too much water, washing and bathing facilities and cattle troughs. Many women panchayats are demanding the use of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana funds for building toilets for women and girls' schools in particular since the national sanitation program is a centralised scheme.

Women and Education

It is not necessary, to stress yet once more the need for women's literacy and education. In M.P., the Literacy Mission has played some role but it is still too inadequate to make any dent into the enormity of the problem. Many women panchayat members feel that their lack of education (not just literacy) is coming in their way of understanding the masses of literature on laws and regulations

which keep pouring into the panchayat offices round the year. The panchayat *karmi* is neither enlightened nor educated enough to make these women understand all the implications. The need for legal literacy is thus assuming critical importance. A common complaint from many

Hand pumps are far more sustainable than piped water in rural areas.



H.K. DHANDA



MANU KULKARNI

A panchayat lady showing the power of the pen in a gram sabha session.

harass us. What should we do? If we knew how to file an FIR and write it properly we can fight our cases". As panchayat members they should have a minimum of legal literacy in terms of understanding which law affects them and how; course of action, whom to approach (jurisdiction) and when (limitation). Our lawyers have no time to assist these women and government legal aid is non-existent. Where do they go? This is the biggest challenge in the years to come. In South Africa, legal literacy is imparted through street corner talks, thanks to Nelson Mandela's initiative for fighting state repression through the instruments of law.

The five areas of concern affect not just women, but also the overall quality of *panchayati raj* governance in M.P in the days to come. It is not just the problem of M.P but that of the entire Indian sub-continent. *Panchayati raj* is the best form of direct democracy. The 'agenda of politics' is much better handled by common people themselves on a day-to-day basis, not just during elections. Organised political parties want elections every five years and their existence depends on them. At the grassroots level, if a panchayat member can do a good job, he/she need not depend on political parties or expensive elections. Grassroots governance is the best method of cleansing Indian politics. By giving ordinary men and women more responsibility, it encourages them to behave more responsibly; by giving them more power it teaches them how to exercise power. If women are given more power, Indian politics and governance can have a humanising, if not a feminising effect.

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Dr. Manu N. Kulkarni is the State Representative of UNICEF in Madhya Pradesh. Dr. Kulkarni has always been concerned about theories of governance. He belongs to a rare species called the 'male feminist', working tirelessly for the representation of women in different tiers of governance. Dr. Kulkarni lives in Bhopal.

ODE TO KETAKI

GAUTAM HARIDAS

My eloquence is waning in the face of Woman
Therefore, in what manner, with what faith
do I sincerely express my regard?
How may I imagine or fittingly conceive
of the throb and pulse of Motherhood
that lives immutable in the softened psyche,
the stainless soul of every girl child.
The essence that the physical shell harbours
as the oyster carries its precious hoard
of the hidden, milk-white pearl
Is it the inviolable presence?
Does innocence natively quest adult beauty
Or is it preserv'd, a girl's girlhood
beyond mar or stain, nor forgotten ever?
There stands in a copse of Nature's bazaar
A solitary, feminine mind and essence
A simple train of thought
veering past rash, ill-thought fecklessness
The light falling upon her head
must be a sanction from above
As the maiden of heaven pursues
the curve of her destiny
The expressive voice and its image
of a young girl of lively gait,
happy eyes and generous laughter
the wisdom and strength steady and proud,

the spirited intelligence and rosy passion
A heroine's unchecked stride.
Daily I watch them grow
the lush femininity touching their souls
And stirring awareness.
Staidly and calmly she observes the pace of nature
changing the world and providing its impetus, as if
it were created by a silent restrained power.
Surely the world-mother lives in the little girl
who plays yonder in amusement and wonder.
She plays by herself, forever God's daughter
Consciously surrendered and utterly dedicated
of simple and direct disposition
living vividly her inner growth
Idealism and honesty, innocence and maturity
to mingle and sprout into the visage of love
She nurtures man, her consort
Guarding in her maternal breast
Undying tenderness and strong love.
Day by day she imitates Nature's ways
teeming with perceptions and alive with fragrance,
the budding flower of heaven, Ketaki.
Her calm reserves,
the charmed confluence of harmony and grace.
A bright red vermillion hue, and rich beauty enhaloed
emerges in the contours of youthful exuberance.
Her existence is a marvel
And may the bride of future mankind ever consent
to play in the pastures of earth and in its green spaces.
May she emerge into vastness
from the shadow of plain, common routine
And once more herald the consummation
of humanity's tryst
with the form of the Goddess.

Gautam Haridas volunteers at THE EYE



THE TRIBAL WOMAN IN INDIA'S QUEST

BULU IMAM

The tribal woman carries not the 'dreary desert sands of dead habit' (*Gitanjali*), that is our colonial mentality, but the orchid-fresh resonances of the *Aum*. Indian images are incredibly rich in meaning.



The ancient Indian ethos was born in the womb of tribal India. It was the aftermath of colonisation that broke the back of India. The tribal woman's emancipation, as in Australia lay, almost exclusively, in the hands of Christian missionaries. Tribals had been at peace with the government, whether British, or that of independent India which carried forward the old vicious legislation for acquiring tribal lands, as well as the principle of *terra nullius*.

The tribal woman is femininity and naturalness fresh sprung from their eternal sources – Mother Goddess, bearer of children. In the modern (and post modern) endeavour to develop her, she has been treated as an object of experiment. She is given a set of choices, not left alone to develop according to her very own special genius. Change should not mean that a new paradigm be thrust *en masse* upon a very sensitive people (as in the history of the Church), but, rather, it should be the renewal of an internal vision. Those who talk about tribals wanting development are not tribals themselves and do not understand the tribal vision from within. Everywhere I look in India, I find my tribal mothers and sisters coping magnificently with enforced change.

The lives of tribals are so close to the vegetable deity, the ultimate mother, to which all civilisations' and religions' supreme icons may be traced. In a world poised on the threshold of

the mutation of our species, the tribal genius has the key to this crisis. The tribal woman carries not the 'dreary desert sands of dead habit' (*Gitanjali*), that is our colonial mentality, but the orchid-fresh resonances of the *Aum*. Indian images are incredibly rich in meaning. A vast and ancient mythological tradition like ours, steeped in tribal streams and dyed with the red soil of their banks, cannot be kept alive without the tribal social milieu. This has always been the crisis of change in India. Even the Buddha went to the forest to find the truth. Our consciousness is supported by an old mythological tradition whose real carriers are our womenfolk. They carry the oral and icon traditions forward from mother to daughter. The tribal woman is a high priestess during the seasons of marriage and harvest, seasonal cycles of the earth mother around which the solar deity merely revolves. The first thing which is tampered with is the tribes' cosmo-vision. Tribals worship the living earth. The mountain is their oldest deity. When the sun was made the centre of the tribes' cosmo-vision their worship of the earth waned.

At the time of our independence, the tribal woman was living at the edge of urban life, and cities were suns where power resided. India under Nehru was bursting with the charge of the Industrial Revolution, the white man's God. Even Gandhi saw the villages as being unclean and the villagers as requiring uplifting. The fifty

which have followed these two mens' visions have altered the most pristine regions of India and her peoples.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his own words was 'a dweller of cities and a hater of everything feudal!' (*Glimpses Of World History*, p. 220) and he also wrote, 'But it does not seem to me to be healthy for any person or for any nation to be always looking back... Let us study our past by all means, and admire in it whatever is worthy of admiration, but our eyes must always look in front and our steps must go ahead.' (*Glimpses* p.69). Clearly, the reasoning of the architect of these past fifty years had a deep impact on the tribal way of life, and the flowering of our tribal womanhood.

Nehru's nationalism contrasted forcefully with Tagore's internationalism. In attempting to create a unitype under the guise of removing casteism, tribal religions and indigenous rights were adroitly bypassed. Bioregions were attacked as sources of economic benefit as India entered an era of western economic colonialism with her power brokers in Delhi. The parliamentary system of our democracy, carrying its own imperatives of power further away from the people, especially tribals in far-flung hill hamlets and forested river valleys, targetted them for destruction in the name of development. Big dams and mines became the modern temples of development. The first big experiment was carried out in the valley of the Damodar River in Hazaribag, ironically, a heavily forested, tribal region. Towns went up from 8.6 per cent to 33.01 per cent; mines from 4.7 per cent to 19.4 per cent; water bodies shrank from 7.3 to 2.9 per cent; forests fell from 70.03 to 0.5 per cent in the Lower Damodar valley. Naturally, these developments affected the tribal woman who was expected to become a coolie or wage earner now that the family's fields and forests had gone from them.

Today the Indian tribal woman has to see herself as not only an Indian, or member of a bioregional community reeling under the impact of sudden displacement, but as a member of the tribal community of the Pacific and Indian Ocean region. Only then can she come to terms with change and re-establish her pride through her cultural ties with Indonesia and Micronesia, Polynesia and Australia. The sharp disparity brought about by a Eurocentric educational system with the living Indian culture of South Asia has only made the tribal woman more confused than she already was. She is expected to dance with water pots on her head in processions of male priests in the modern church, or to accept the humiliation of male chauvinism in the Hindu household. This has severed the cultural stability of her ancient roots.

I have seen the simple tribal woman



You can go to what was once the heart of vast forested tracts of Manbhum in Dhanbad and see the tribal girl with a red ribbon in her raven hair with sad eyes and betel stained teeth drinking water from a tubewell, soliciting customers.

completely at ease as a cabin attendant or as a bureaucrat as she accomodates change. But how many tribal women become these? Basically, the tribal woman turns from a housewife into a coolie or comfort woman. I once met a coolie woman in the Jharkhand coal mine near Hazaribag. She was an Oraon tribal, not Christian, did not know her tribe's Kurukh language. She was wearing a tattered synthetic sari, sitting outside a shanty which was once on agricultural fields, now a sprawling coal mine. She stands in my mind's eye as the classic icon of the modern Indian tribal woman. Or you can go to what was once the heart of vast forested tracts of Manbhum in Dhanbad and see the tribal girl with a red ribbon in her raven hair with sad eyes and betel stained teeth drinking water from a tubewell, soliciting customers. This icon of the modern tribal is beautifully expressed in a modern Birhor song.

*Come, both my sisters,
Let us go and work at Marafari dam;
At twelve o'clock during the noon
Tiffin break we will go and eat
Betel and water.*

(Kamli and Somri, Dong)

Who is the tribal woman I continually speak of? She is one of the so-called Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes or Other Backward Castes. She is the body and soul of India, smashed to smithereens by greedy minds. Nylon brassieres and panties are being advertised in our villages in Hazaribag. My anger and tears are over, we are now facing the beast; the evening smoke of village wood fires are being replaced by the noxious fumes of coking coal. This is the land where the Buddha walked and this is where the tribal girl gave rice and curd to the fasting Sakyamuni. That tribal girl, Sujata, is my emblem of the tribal woman. Is Sujata indigenous?

The indigenous status of our tribals has been denied repeatedly because of the government's stance of considering all Indians as part of a mixed population. Again and again at the Working Group on Indigenous Populations held annually at Geneva, the Indian government's representative has denied that the UN's Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples is applicable to India. On the other hand, there is enough archaeological, anthropological, and administrative evidence for the indigenous nature of our tribals. I will not go into the Declaration in detail here, but it guarantees the individual and collective rights of our indigenous peoples to protect their culture, religion, lifestyle, lands, forests, and sacred sites from any form of exploitation, with measures for redressal of any infringement of these rights.

Who is an indigenous person? To safeguard even the very identity of an indigenous person, the United Nations has, in its collective representation opted not to frame a definition as it would be limiting. Every indigenous person is given a sovereign status under the United Nations mandate, with a member representative in the General Assembly. India and Bangladesh continue to demand a definition, while at the same time refusing to accept that the Declaration applies to their member states! India is run by a small, powerful, non-tribal, class elite centred in our political

and economic capitals. Ranks are allowed to be broken by those who do not share this status but represent indigenous communities. The tribal woman is conspicuous by her absence in this arena with a few bureaucratic exceptions. Those who oppose the Declaration are obviously non-indigenous. At the last Working Group meeting in Geneva in July last year (where I had presented a paper), a representative from Asia said that a national commission headed by the Prime Minister had been set up within the framework of the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education, but no indigenous person had been accepted as a member of that committee.

The role of the tribal woman has traditionally been that of teacher, especially to the girl-child, even as the village was the school, and the forest the playground. Today these things are fast changing. The tribal woman has lost or is losing her social and spiritual authority, while the children are sent to government or missionary schools where they are forced to learn English and learn about an alien religion. They have to face strict regimentation. The tribal woman is, meanwhile, being cajoled into an adult education programme. Basic 'modern' education ignores the tribe's folklore and mythology; its oral traditions are dying with the elders, and songs and dances are disappearing. Dance and song are air and water to the tribal woman. Their dance grounds are being vandalised by mines or modern infrastructures. Old musical instruments are being replaced by tape recorders. The soul of the dance and song are dying.

Everytime people who decry tribal rights to protect their cultural heritage and religious systems, point to their illiteracy. The tribal woman may not have a word for a particular thing but she will have a dozen ways of expressing its every aspect. Her everyday speech in her natural surroundings is poetry. She understands song and music and dance but perhaps not poetry for its own sake. The songs sung by tribal women such as the Santal woman is famous for its explicit erotic suggestiveness. Today the mission-educated Santal girl would be shy to sing these songs. The inherent religiousness of the sexuality implicit in life has been an outstanding feature of all tribal life, 'animal innocent' if you like. Because of the absence of a spoken or written theology, the whole tribal religious experience and cosmovision is debunked by arm-chaired, cross-legged western theologians!

The tribal woman has no tribal religion to officially turn to, not even to ensure her matriarchal status or the rights of her children. Tribal religion is not officially recognized by the Constitution of India although 'animism' is implicit in Hinduism. Tribal religion does not feature in the Census of India questionnaire, nor



The role of the tribal woman has traditionally been that of teacher, especially to the girl-child, even as the village was the school, and the forest the playground.

is it otherwise recognized. How does this impact upon these living representatives of the ancient cult of the Mother Goddess, she who emerged as the first government of the human family in prehistoric cave theocracy? The 'Brahmin' may be anyone who wields social and economic power. In fact, this is a classic usage of the term, and the emergence of the tribal woman over the past fifty years has to be seen through an understanding of the role of this Brahmin. He is the inheritor of the tradition of the witch-doctor or witch-hunter (*baghaut*) inherent in the old tribal tradition, possibly directly traceable to male supremacy at the time of domestication of cattle over seven thousand years ago, which is also the tribal Ramayana tradition. The chief enemy of the witch-doctor is the married woman. The belief that some married women were witches was always there, but now we see today's tribal woman faced with a new array of male dominated power structures which she has to counter.

On the one hand, the tribal woman is still to be found beautifully frolicsome and at ease in



B.N. SARASWATI

the last unspoiled natural pockets left in the folds of our eastern hills among the remains of some ancient Javan adventurer or Bugi – on the other, less than half a dozen miles away you may see her as the mine-displaced tribal woman, and on the road between the forest and the mine you might see her driving a car. Is it possible? Only the impossible is possible, of course!

I very strongly believe that the first mutant to guide our erring humanity into the next millenium has to come from the womb-brain as a result of long-term genetic and not short-term cultural evolution. Here the tribal woman will play her ancient syncretic role in the rebuilding of our collapsed civilisation. As I have seen and understood the tribal woman as wife and mother of my children, I have come to realize how urgent is my mission to protect her. Despite massive damage to tribal environment and culture, and abuse of their human and indigenous rights

Bulu Imam has pleaded for the cause of tribals from as far back as we can remember. He is an environmentalist, archaeologist, writer and activist, living in Hazaribagh on the Chotanagpur plateau, a rich tribal area. He is Convenor, INTACH in the region.

OH TRIBAL WOMAN !

KISHORE SANT

Tribal woman, you have been identified, at last ! Your plight has become the concern of policy-makers and planners. A category has been created for budgetary allocation to benefit you. Soon departments will be set up and officers appointed to develop you. But before that, we need to study you, to understand you. That is why this conference. Notice that it is a national conference, so you have national importance, do not forget this. There are many agencies involved in this. There is even an international agency. Aren't you pleased with all this concern and attention?

Tribal woman, *adivasi nari*, where have you been all this time? Why have we not been able to locate you? It is not that you did not exist. We have seen your pictures, usually semi-naked, adorning the walls of tourist agencies and hotels. We have seen newsreels featuring you in folk dances with the highest in the land. You have provided luscious copy for glossy magazines. We have seen you in thousands on the big dam construction sites, contributing your mighty mite to building temples of our age. Occasionally, some sensitive and cussed journalist or filmmaker or academic has seen the seamier side and exposed the flesh trade, the bonded labour, the semi-starvation, the premature aging, the perpetual grind and drudgery of felling, digging, gathering, carrying on for sheer survival. Yes, you have been very much there providing the raw labour not only for your own family but also for the myriad nation-building activities, even when most of these have razed your home and hearth to the ground and taken over or destroyed your natural resource base and ancestral shrines. You have been there and we have provided the bare minimum for you to stay alive for these nation-building tasks. It is another matter that even this did not always reach you and you were forced to scrounge just to keep body and soul together.

Tribal woman, now that we have found you, we are going to discuss you. We are going to try to understand your place in development. You see, development and progress are inevitable. 'The old order changeth yielding place to the new'. You belong to a very ancient order. It was close to nature and it was a remarkable blend of culture and nature.

It was self-sustaining but we saw it as static. Anyway, it was incompatible with development. It was in the way of development. So it had to be transcended, by law and commerce, if possible, through subterfuge and chicanery if necessary. This has been accomplished in ample measure. Your commons and forests have been taken away or depleted. Your rivers are dammed and your cultivable lands flooded. Where there are minerals beneath your lands, trees and soil have been removed. The weather and water cycles, crop rotations, the forestry - animal husbandry - crop - integrations have been disrupted.

And, with this your special knowledge, skills and practices have lost their pertinence. There is a new presence of men, materials and machines. There are new networks and grids of roads, electricity, telephones. There are new institutions of health, education, administration, commerce, mostly manned by outsiders. They are in command, they are the masters. You have been contained. Your place and role have been defined at the lowest rung of the new economic and social order. You will be the modern version of medieval hewers of wood and drawers of water. You will provide the raw labour for construction, for cultivation, for mining and for industry. You are the neo-Shudras. You, who once sang and danced as queens in your homestead, you who were once



the proud possessors of all you surveyed, you who once had all you needed and more, you are reduced to abject penury and dependence, estranged and enslaved in your own homelands.

Tribal woman, having dislocated and impoverished you, we are now planning to develop you. We want to understand your special needs and work out the opportunities and programmes for these. Some of us have carried out successful experiments for your development. This has usually meant staving off perpetual semi-starvation, providing relief or, at best, an above poverty line existence for a few years for a few selected and carefully targetted beneficiaries. None of us has been concerned with restoring and revitalising your dignity in communities and as citizens of a democratic republic. We have paid scant attention to the restoration and regeneration of your primary productive resources of land, water and forests. These are the more difficult and awkward questions and few of us have the courage to raise these.

So, tribal woman, we shall discuss you and bring forth some more ideas about your health, nutrition, literacy and income generation needs. We may even make suggestions for your increased representation in panchayats and cooperatives, your own separate organisations, your independent income and your own leadership. We shall make you understand that the primary oppressors are the men in your families and societies and you have to struggle to liberate yourself from them. We shall stress that more research is needed to understand your special problem, so training seminars and publication are the key tasks for your uplift. We shall do all these but we shall not deal with the more basic issues of the quantity and quality of assets needed by your communities for a viable,

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sustainable and dignified development. We shall not even talk about your own knowledge and skills, your own perceptions and sensibilities and your implicit worldview about nature, about universe and about society. We shall not allow these unknown possibilities to disturb our logical, scientific composure.

But tribal woman, *adi nari*, there is some hope. Realisation is dawning even though ever so slowly, that we have done serious damage not only to you and yours but also to Mother Earth, and this cannot go on. There are inklings of doubt about our new-fangled ways and we may yet resort to your ways and capabilities, your ancient pacts and checks and balances with nature. We may rediscover your close kinship with nature and its nurturing and self-sustaining modes. We may recognise our failure and the dangers it entails. We may give you a chance to reclaim and restore what is yours by ancient right and usage. But for this to happen, you who are the closest to Mother Earth must speak on her behalf as only you can. And you must do it before it is too late, before we all succumb to silence, the silence of creeping death!



Kishore Sant's is a well known voice in the development discourse. He is attached to the Ubeswar Vikas Mandal, Udaipur, Rajasthan, which engages itself in research and activism. It is at the forefront of campaigns to foster sustainable development in the Rajasthan Aravallis. This piece was written for the National Conference on Tribal Women, organized at the MIV Tribal Research and Training Institute, Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Illustration: Roopam Bhattacharya



FUR

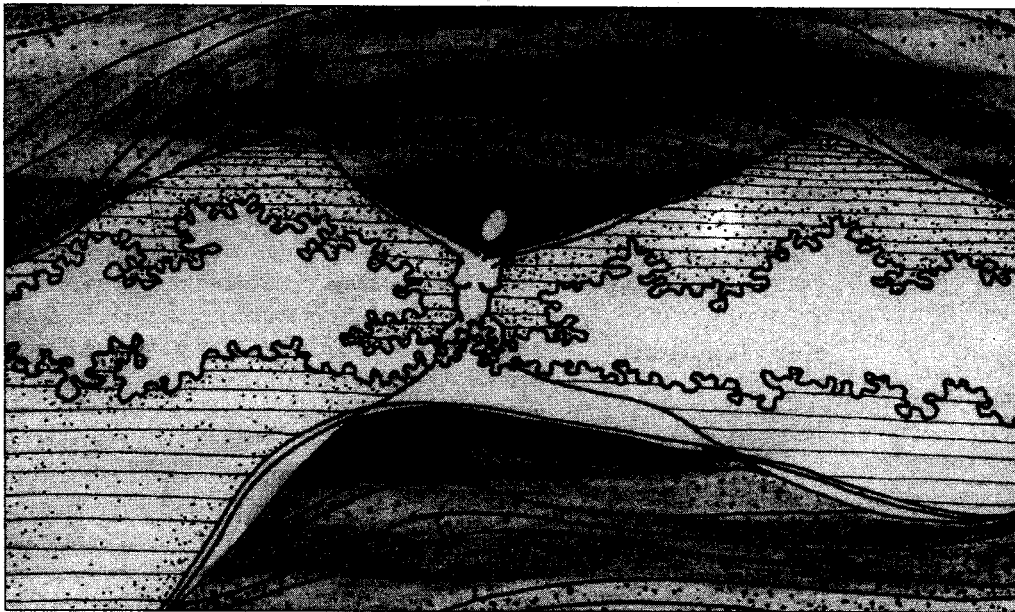
The Foundation for Universal Responsibility (FUR) was established by His Holiness The Dalai Lama with funds from the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Foundation has been working towards promoting dialogue between different religious faiths, in creating an awareness on issues related to the environment, towards developing a sense of secular values in the young.

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TOURISM AND GENDER

NINA RAO



SHOUNAK RAY



The 'Women in Development' approaches, which aim to enhance the participation and role of women in development projects, which is often the case with tourism, attempts to place women as community managers and economic producers, ignoring the tension that such role play involves for women who are also responsible, as the ones who nurture, prepare and present items of daily life and ritual. This indicates that women do not function as leaders, they are implementers of tradition.

To understand the impact of tourism on women it is necessary to be familiar with the debate on the use of the term *gender*. The term *gender* according to Swain signifies the 'system of cultural identities and social relationships between females and males' and the term is therefore significantly different from the biological influences, the perceptions, roles and relations between men and women, which then determine their social characteristics. Most tourism development studies are optimistic about the participation of women in tourism related activity and employment but even this optimism is coloured by a gender bias. Most of these studies describes women as being socialised to be sensitive to the needs of others because they are coping with their reproductive roles even as they cope with earning an income generally considered supplementary to the income of the male members of the family. There is a clear distinction not only in defining tasks as feminine but also in giving decision making power, based on ownership and economic activity, to women. The biological-functional view predominates in such ideologies. This view takes advantage of the fact that women in Third World countries, particularly in backward regions, have a significantly lower level of literacy, thus legitimising women's position in a patriarchal value system.

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tension that such role play involves for women who are also responsible, as the ones who nurture, prepare and present items of daily life and ritual. This indicates that women do not function as leaders, they are *implementers* of tradition. An example is the issue of village water supply, which becomes important since tourism is a water intensive activity. Water is generally carried to the point of use. Women are supposed to be merely carriers of water since they have no technical training, and any decision on the use of water and method of its collection and carriage is decided by men; women *implement* such decisions. Similarly, women who have a certain economic autonomy in the informal sector lose this autonomy in the developmental process which tries to bring women into the formal economy, resulting in the introduction of male control in areas which had been a female preserve. Many have critiqued this approach to bring women, who operate in the informal sector into the formal sector as euro-centric, since European economies do not depend so much on the informal sector. In the case of tourism however, the bed and breakfast business remains in the informal sector with women, in many parts of the world. It is interesting to see that women do feel an erosion of their position as tourism grows and enforces international standards the world over.

The reason for looking at the issue of women and tourism in this perspective is to recognise that gender is a significant variable in any human relationship, and much more so in the relation between women as members of a 'host' community and tourists. As a third world activist and scholar I am interested in exploring local and global gender relations in the process of tourism activity as it takes place in an intercultural encounter. Development theory recognises only common generalisations that have an impact on the lifestyle and life processes, without distinguishing cultural identities and social relationships. For example, the sexual freedom enjoyed by some women in areas of Spiti may not be socially acceptable to women in Nepalese mountain areas, or in a specific region where tourism is to be developed. Again sexual relations between such women and tourists are quite different to sex tourism as promoted in Thailand.

Interestingly, once Japanese women began to emerge as a significant market, the Thai sex tourism trade began to take steps to cover up the attraction of Thai brothels for Japanese men. European women on the other hand felt secure with the idea of men letting down norms with prostitutes or foreign women rather than a mistress at home.

Given that tourism is a distinct form of consumerism, being a part of leisure time and a quest for a unique and extraordinary experience, we can see that tourism has a political structure that reflects class and the global economic hierarchy. The receiving community responds to this quest by manipulating experiences for the visitor according to the ideological features of western culture. It is interesting to note that Caribbean women are used as an exotic marker to promote beach tourism by being photographed nude, to enthruse German visitors and such a representation is taken as meaningful for the tourists.

The increase in both family and societal violence against women has not decreased through tourism development. In most case studies relating to tourism and the role of women, tourism has been looked at as a benefit in economic, socio-cultural and environmental terms. Nowhere have these studies shown that employment in tourism is not gender stereotyped or falling outside of the international division of labour where no new economic or income earning opportunities are availed of by women. The interesting aspect of tourism development is that it has exploited the productivity of women without conferring ownership rights to them. Income generation is seen as supplementary to ownership and income alone does not confer status to those who are running a lodge or cooking and cleaning for tourists. In class as well as gender terms there is no change or personal development for women because tourists are seen as belonging to a better social category than those serving them and their economic power perpetuates this relationship over time, since the women employed in tourism cannot become tourists to the countries from where their customers have come. Tourism retains the norms of what we have seen defined as women's work (*M Thea Sinclair, 1996*). In a case study of women in the Garhwal region of India, Rana (*EPW, May 1996*) has shown that despite the increasing productivity of women agriculturists their status has not improved because they do not have land rights.

Policy makers, by giving incentives to hotels and foreign investors are once again bringing the informal sector within the formal sector and denying women their space. Similarly, in the handicrafts industry the number of hours

It is interesting to note that Caribbean women are used as an exotic marker to promote beach tourism by being photographed nude, to enthruse German visitors

worked between male and female members of the family do not give the women the right to manage and market production, nor do they have access to the income for any other uses. This indicates that even though tourism does offer opportunities for income and employment, it does not transform the fundamental relationship between male and female members of the household and the community. It is abandoned women or women headed households where we find there has been a change in the situation, since there is no male control. In Asian countries women are involved in the retail sector but no studies have followed up the use and retention of money by women from retailing activity.

We can also see that in tourism the traditional out migration of men, their role as porters and their role in agriculture are extended to guiding, boating, riding etc. as a representation of their greater strength and social position. Women are seen as being good at routine jobs, particularly serving, where their feminine attractiveness is an advantage. In tourism services many employers select uniforms and accessories to enhance the attractiveness of female employees and demand that they encourage the flirtatious advances of the customer. Men do not have any barriers to mobility and can migrate from their home villages to access employment in tourism wherever the project is located. Young, unmarried women can have such access only when their male decision makers allow their participation and upon marriage the husband would demand their presence at home. Research shows that tourism, like other economic activity only masks the determining role of gender in employment and does not bring about any radical societal change, as is often claimed by policy makers. Tourism development, through demonstration and through changes in value systems

or family systems is said to promote modernity through the guest-host interaction, rather than promoting otherness. In this perspective it might be interesting to see that an increase in women headed households due to the out migration of men leads to the transfer of economic power to a younger generation. There is also the desire for urbanisation in rural societies since it is assumed that urban women have more freedom. This need not be the desired fruit of modernity. These 'benefits' are however the trend in western cultures. Similarly, cultural, racial and moral differences continue to play a role in the way in which marginal or subordinate racial groups (*adivasis*), cultures and sexualities are defined and constructed as 'others' in relation



Tourism ads in the Caribbean.

There are several contestable assumptions in the pro-tourism debate. These can be briefly summarised in the following way: that male experience is universal, including the North as Male and the South as female. That women are to be judged by male standards which are universal; that male biological superiority is a model that is not necessarily oppressive; that being women-centred is a divisive issue; and that both male and female experiences are mediated by other characteristics and cannot be looked at as contradictory. Concerned research has shown that women-centred field work has on the other hand opened up not only the tourism debate but also the disciplines which have now been associated with social and cultural studies and brought new insights to the question of exercising the tourism option. In the Himalayan region we have to take up the assumption of the modernity of the modern sector and the backwardness of the traditional sector. It is in this context that we have to locate an analysis of issues like unemployment, poverty, conflict between castes, religious sects, tribes, regions and women. Added to this are the conditionalities of the globalisation processes that tourism demands in terms of minimum international standards. We can look at these contradictions in the following way:

1. Direct intervention by state or NGO sponsored development in the form of development plans and foreign exchange earnings for communities who have to be brought out of backwardness and poverty. In such planning the role and participation of women is considered critical to the success of the project, and the whole community is educated to allow women to play their part. Ecotourism and conservation give an important place to women, but in their gendered position. Income is a bait most women would bite because as nurturers they have to find the supplementary income as a survival strategy.

2. Impoverishment leading to anti-elite conflicts as can be seen in the expansion of tourism facilities in the hill areas which is being resisted by the local people, for example the Spiti Tourism Society which opposes the state governments proposal to build a three star hotel in Spiti even if it means forgoing the Rs30 crore investment. Similarly the anti-tourism movement in Goa.

3. Economic poverty and distress used by comprador fundamentalist forces who identify one major enemy, as has happened in Kashmir, with the pro-Islamic militancy movement attacking tourists and destroying households dependent on tourism, to carry the fight against the Indian state to all fronts.

4. Competition for direct foreign investments leading to secessionist movements, as in the case of a separate state of Uttarakhand

(including the hill areas of Uttar Pradesh) which has to depend on tourism for economic development. Here women would be agents of the desired changes, since tourism is a low paid and low skilled employment area.

5. Unemployment and food insecurity which cause the backward regions to want to secede and the nation state becomes too weak to intervene, as we have seen in the case of several militant movements in the North East, all of whom see tourism as the source of foreign exchange needed to catch up with the advanced regions of the country. Women are again the agents, not only for cooking and serving, but also for agricultural support and handicraft production, which are the mainstay of tourism in such regions. In all these cases women have played a militant role whether political, military or economic but they have also been subjected to gendered punishment in the form of molestation, rape and widowhood.

Tourism development also raises environmental issues, and the gender perspective is important, since women are generally the fuel, water and resource gatherers, where the cost of many of the items for cooking and cleaning are high. In Ladakh it is the women who negotiate with the army for low cost kerosene supplies and the army quota of rum and petrol, since firewood is in short supply and the high altitude makes cooking time for non-Ladakhi food much longer. In return, women operate bars where the soldiers come to drink the rum they sold, at a higher price for the company of women, since they are separated from their families. Development planners do not consider the impact on the community of women when redesigning the planning process. They take for granted the ability of women to develop survival strategies in the most demanding situations.

In the modern period of tourism development, the discovery motif has been a dominant symbol of tourism to the east. The discovery motif represents the discovered land as an empty space on which linguistic, cultural and eventually territorial claims can be made, much like the colonisers of the past. Hill tourism is a British development in which a series of hill stations were developed in the four Presidency areas with the latest technology and as urban centres to cater to the needs of the English families resident in India. There was no relationship between the life and the culture of the local people and the colonialists who appropriated their land and resources.



Culture and fun! The message on the poster.

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An Egyptian lady at the Multi-Kulti cultural show at Stuttgart

By drawing on the motif of discovery the travel writer/tour operator can lay a claim to new knowledge, which is then processed and circulated via the binarisms that race and nationality endow on the privileged discoverer. This is a kind of self inscription on to the lives of the people at the tourist destination, who are conceived of as an extension of the landscape. The gendering of tourism rests on the colonial functions of civilising, rescuing, idealising and demonising Indian subjects as the 'other'. The Indian upper class is also co-opted into taking a similar position. Western civilisation and its native clone are superior to the backward and primitive cultures of the back regions where tourism has located its spirit of adventure. The rescue scenario states that Indian women are to be saved from their backward social institutions and their character and lives improved according to western liberalism; the woman question has been an important marker in the colonial discourse and became the distinguishing characteristic between the modern west and the backward east. It was believed that native women led devalued lives whilst their European sisters led a supposedly superior existence. Women became mute but central characters in the dialogue between western and Indian men. Modern or traditional the qualities of virtue, fidelity and subservience were desirable in women. They were thus ideal for the service or hospitality trade as long as they were kept from mingling freely with male customers.

An important aspect of gender in tourism is the opportunity for sexual encounters with local women who are located in a liminal space, outside the domestic sphere and inhabiting the location of the recreational space. Contemporary tourists, not unlike their predecessors, and modern planners, in their reformist zeal, have not included the reappraisal of the status and rights of women in their new agency. Who is being rescued in such an enterprise? We have seen that tourism is rescuing the male controlled and structured social and cultural relations that different production systems have created.

If this was not the case we would not have had tourists on treks photographing nude hill women for a dollar fee, since these women have the responsibility of keeping the money-order economy going without the right to earn a money income from other sources, which are denied to them by the hierarchy of tasks that apply to tourism as well. Drug peddlers have also used male control of the social role of women by paying the male head of the family to allow them a live-in hill woman as a cover for their procurement of drugs along well established circuits in

the Himalayas. Hill women have always been projected as fair and beautiful, fit subjects of an oriental idyll, and like other native women full of pure passion for their western lovers. The post 1857 novels are replete with such stories, where these illicit liaisons are concluded by the death of the native women. The white lover is absolved of guilt and returns to the bosom of the home cultural values. Is modern tourism discovering such delights in the Third World too?

In conclusion I would like to point out that tourism projects have made no difference to several indicators that determine the status of women as a look at the Census of India Report 1991 shows. These are problems like the declining sex ratio, adult literacy, girl child retained in the school system, infant mortality rate and infanticide, life expectancy and birth rate. Access to health and nutrition have also not been studied. The age of marriage (as an institution conferring status on women) has also not been strictly adhered to for girls, who have to be watched as long as they are single so that they do not bring dishonour to the family. Violence against women like rape of minors and dowry deaths are on the increase. Women's awareness about themselves and their society are also very different. Every society identifies the use of consumer items as an indicator of social progress, for example, the use of foot wear, reading a newspaper, using mill made cloth or cosmetics. In all these areas women are still lagging behind the progress made by men. Watches, clocks and radios are also favoured items of consumption, and men are again ahead in such consumption. Traditional food is also an area where men have diverted to the changes that multiculturalism has introduced. This imbalance is reflected in language skills as well. As researchers in the field of women and tourism development we have often wondered why the field studies remain at the level of income and employment. Have we not been swayed by the predominant ideology of tourism as a blessing? As we accept and internalise models create in completely different circumstances, are we not closing our eyes to the fundamental gender issues that confront women in communities across the country?

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Photographs courtesy: Nina Rao

SHOCK (NON) ABSORBERS



The ad revolution doesn't help the cause of women. Take the case of the Tourism Department's promo that depicts Kerala as a 'woman of substance' with an exposed back.



You are a young girl brought from Burma. You are terrified. You have no idea where you are, what country you are in, what's going to happen to you. If you haven't been raped along the way (or sometimes even if you have) you are immediately brought to the 'Room of the Unveiling of the Virgin'. There you are raped continuously—until you can no longer pass for a virgin. Then you are put to work.



Almost seventy five percent of the five million tourists who come to Thailand each year are males. Some companies go so far as to arrange special tours as incentives and rewards for their employees. Men are guaranteed a good time and to sweeten the deal, are given the impression that they are actually doing good deeds. "When you screw here, you may not do it for Germany, but you certainly do it for the welfare of Kenya."

THE

DIPANKAR DAS



Despite all the claims of the State that it displays an honest political will to empower women, the Saathin programme is a clear indicator that there is none.

The developmental ventures of the last 50 years have left a trail of lessons behind which need to be heeded closely. One of these lessons is the proven multiplier effect that attitudinal change among women has on the rest of society. As those involved with the spread of literacy are fond of saying 'educating a man is educating an individual but educating a woman is educating a family'.

Even the process of this aforesaid education tends to be far more effective if it is imparted by change agents drawn from the local culture. Perhaps, such conjectures were at the back of the minds of policy-makers when *saathins* (community workers) were included in the Women Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan. It was a relatively unambitious beginning with 100 *saathins* expected to operate in each of Rajasthan's 21 districts. This in effect meant, that each *saathin* was expected to cover a large number of villages, often scattered over hundreds of kilometres. Without any means of transport at their disposal and living on a meagre handout of Rs 250 a month, *saathins* had an uphill task. Their brief was even heavier than the conditions of employment. They were expected to perform 60 to 70 jobs which varied from making women aware of the virtues of family planning to educating them on the finer points of childcare and informing the authorities of instances of child marriages and caste discrimination.

In 1984, when the programme began, it seemed indeed that the powers that be and policy makers were committed to rescuing the mass of rural women from their endemic backwardness. But, strangely enough, doing precisely what they were expected to, saw the *saathins* in rough weather with the government. It has been evident from Community Development Programmes that at the local level, the government machinery tends to be very close to the local elites. The *saathin's* quick rise towards self-empowerment, and commitment to raising awareness among people was intensely disliked by the patriarchal set-up. For example, during the drought of 1987-88 *saathins* kept the agencies informed about the state of drought in various parts of Rajasthan. In doing so, they also resisted the cornering of relief supplies by dominant groups in certain areas. When 38 *sarpanches* in Bassi Panchayat Samiti, Jaipur, boycotted *saathins* for

discouraging child marriages, the government was silent, while later on some *saathins* were dismissed when they failed to stop child marriages from taking place.

Not surprisingly, of the 2,100 posts created on paper, only 655 were filled. In 1990, five *saathins* were suspended for attending the women's conference at Kozhikode under the banner of a women's group. (They were reinstated following a court order.) The gang-rape of *saathin* Bhanwari Devi was a flashpoint and the Rajasthan government's extreme reluctance to bring the perpetrators to book has only gone to show which way the wind blows. The local BJP MLA even went to the extent of stating on the floor of the Assembly, that Bhanwari Devi was lying, while the issue was sub-judice.

Therefore, it came as little surprise when recently, the Rajasthan Government disbanded the programme altogether. Explaining the move, Chief Secretary M.L. Mehta said in a letter to the National Commission for Women (NCM) that while the *saathins* had initially made a significant contribution to creating awareness among rural women, 'they could not succeed in mobilising these women into cohesive and self-sustaining groups.' It goes on to lament that even a decade after the launch of the programme rural women 'remained largely marginalised and passive'.

In sharp contrast to these observations, the NCM's report on the *saathin's* ability to 'ingratiate herself with the villagers and introduce social change is a significant landmark in the history of community awareness and development.' Later in the report it states: 'the empowering process has led to a reversal of traditional gender roles and resulted in drawing women into community forums at the village and other levels.' It recommended that at this crucial juncture, the movement needed to be sustained and also recommended, that their meagre allowance be raised, a demand, which when articulated by the *saathins* provided the government the excuse to scrap the programme.

It seems amply clear that the government is yet again caught in the schism of keeping up its good intentions without any follow-up of good practice. The government is unable to contend with the strength of these women who have entered the social, economic and political arena. In a desperate move, the Rajasthan government is trying lure these intrepid women back to the safer realms of domesticity with employment schemes. Whether popular pressure will be able to force the government to revoke its tendentious decision remains to be seen.

BHANWARI DEVI

Much of the debate on *saathins* has come to revolve around the case of Bhanwari Devi. In keeping with her brief, Bhanwari Devi, a *saathin* of Bhateri village in Rajasthan reported a case of the marriage of the one-year-old daughter of the local potentate Ram Karan Gujjar. Thanks to Bhanwari's efforts the marriage was stopped (only to be solemnised later in the night). Gujjar swore to teach Bhanwari a lesson for what he deemed to be a personal insult. The villagers were forced to boycott her. When this failed, on September 22, 1992, Mohan, Bhanwari's husband was attacked by Gujjar and his henchmen. Hearing his cries Bhanwari rushed to help and while two men held Mohun, Bhanwari was raped.

When Bhanwari tried to report the case, the police disbelieved her and were extremely reluctant to record her statement, the local PHC initially refused to examine her medically and the magistrate was equally supportive of a systematic delay in medically examining her. Finally, the judgement delivered by Justice Jaspal Singh of the sessions court at Jaipur absolved the accused of the charges of rape and only passed minor sentences of a few months of imprisonment for manhandling Bhanwari Devi and her husband. The judgement rested almost

entirely on the delayed medical examination while completely ignoring Bhanwari Devi's statement.

The judgement held that given the nature of the Indian ethos it was impossible that an uncle-nephew duo would be involved in raping a woman, especially because they belonged to the Brahmin caste. It also wondered how Mohun could let such a thing happen in front of him when Indian culture decrees that it is the sworn duty of the husband to protect his wife from harm. When this judgement was followed by nation-wide protests, the central government handed the case over to the CBI, which recorded Bhanwari Devi's statement nine times over. As is characteristic of the Indian judiciary, things are proceeding at a snail slow pace. Meanwhile, the protest movement which had taken shape to cry out against the predicament of Bhanwari Devi is mushrooming into something bigger, pitched as it is against the decision to scrap the institution of *saathins* under feeble pretexts.



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Photos: Jagori

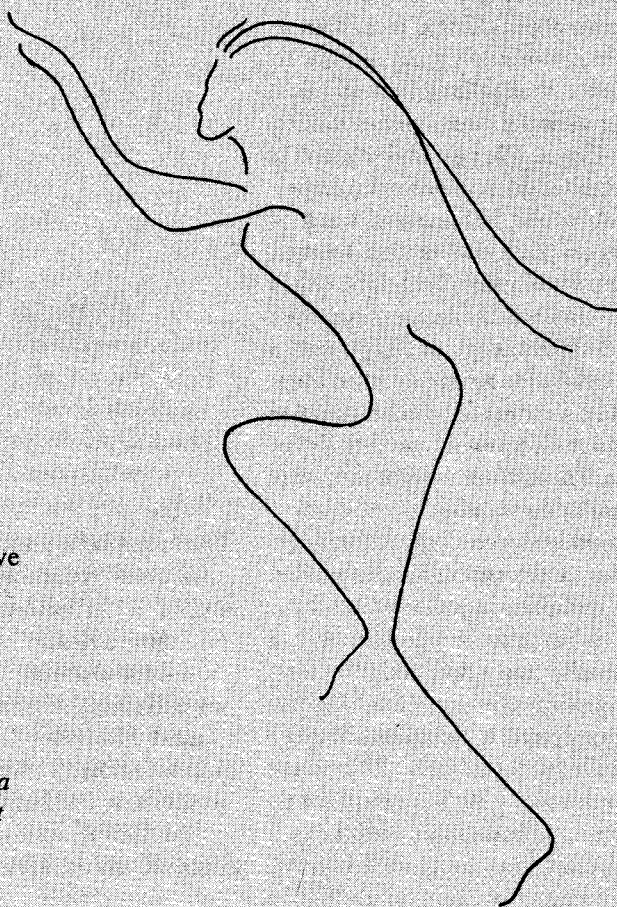
Women of Spirit

I will not die an unlived life
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible,
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch
a promise.

I choose to risk my significance to live
so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom,
and that which came
to me a blossom,
goes on as fruit.

Dawna Markova
Women of Spirit



CONSTRAINTS OF THE REAL WORLD

VS. A Case for Single Gender Institutions WOMEN'S COLLEGES

SHUCHI SINHA &
TANVI GAUTAM

Being an educated young woman in these fast changing times and learning to find one's own place in society is a difficult yet excitingly challenging prospect. The role of institutions catering to women's education becomes increasingly pertinent, even as it becomes more debatable and controversial with the onset of the increasingly liberal (though still questionable) attitudes towards the relative roles of the sexes in society. Women's education (and its linked issue - their status in society) would be extremely relevant to our examination of this issue, before we put forward points of personal experience in response to it.

Historically, women were not always denied the right to knowledge, nor was their status always the lower. Constraints of time, space and the non-availability of continuous historical information limits the anthropological-historical perspective to a colourful patchwork. Among the earliest societies, the pre-Vedic, Harappan and Mohenjodaro societies, those of Babylonia, Egypt, Phrygia and Phoenicia worshipped the Mother Goddess as powerful deities. The Code of Hammurabi, an ancient king of Babylon (18th Century BC) shows that women could trade on their own account, be judges, elders and scribes, bearing witness to the fact that they were highly educated. The women of Egypt were a step ahead, mixing freely, being at par with men. They worked in many sectors of the economy and administration. It is a well known fact that Egypt has had many queens. The Spartan women too, were famed for their remarkable abilities.

However, the women in Greece degenerated from their dignified position, as seen in the Homeric odes, to the position of childbearing slaves and were denied education. The Vedic society and the Aryan culture in India gradually saw a decline in the level of education and status of women. Texts like the *Manu Smriti* were interpreted as recommending the withholding of knowledge from them. They were later debarred from the study of Sanskrit, though the *shastras* talk of two women sages well known for their outstanding erudition, Gargi and Maitreyi. Interestingly, two premier colleges of Delhi are

ASHEESH SABARWAL



Face of our future ?

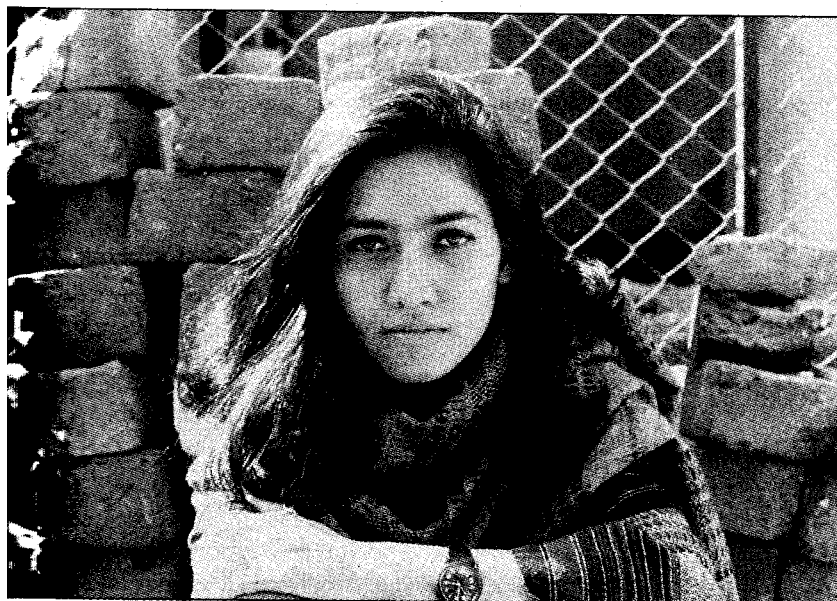
The *shastras* talk of two women sages well known for their outstanding erudition, Gargi and Maitreyi. Interestingly, two premier colleges of Delhi are named after them.

named after them. Early Christianity saw women as temptresses and knowledgeable women who seemed to threaten the bastions of patriarchal social structures were often burnt at the stake as 'witches'. The period of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, however, did see some brilliant women of great intellect, and a few women professors are said to have taught in Italian and French Universities of the time.

Mary Wollstonecraft, wife of the eminent British political thinker and writer William Godwin, can be seen as the first feminist educationist of the English speaking world. Her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and the radical *Vindication of the Rights of Women* are seen as the earliest manifestos of women's education. It was, however, the 19th century with its economic, technical and social upheavals based on the Industrial Revolution which saw the most drastic changes. Queen's College, the first women's college in England, was set up in 1848. Special women's colleges were founded in the United States as early as the 1830s.

In India, the move to promote women's contemporary education was started by the nationalist movement which wanted to lay the foundation of a strong Indian society free of social evils. Sometimes it was in tandem with foreign missionaries. The first girls' schools set up by eminent educationists like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Annie Besant met with fierce opposition in a world where women were often seen as male property with no individual identity

and where women themselves were conditioned into acceptance of exploitative social customs. Similar to the 'witch-hunts' in medieval England, people were suspicious of the notion of knowledgeable women and girls daring to go to school were often stoned and abused.



ASHESH SABARWAL

Not just another brick in the wall.

Nevertheless, these valiant pioneers, along with many other lesser known but equally enterprising educationists continued to further the cause of women's education through girls schools and colleges. Pandita Ramabai, the humble but dynamic Maharashtrian Christian scholar, social reformer and emancipator, challenged religious orthodoxies banning women from learning, based on the authority of the scriptures themselves, including the much quoted *Smriti* of Manu. The first woman teacher in India was appointed around 1830 (girls had begun creeping into the mission schools by 1824). In 1896, Pandita Ramabai established the Mukti Mission at Kedgaon, a pioneering women's institution, a girls' school and Sharada Sadan by 1884. Gradually, more and more single sex institutions catering to women's education came up all over the country and today we have a state like Kerala which boasts of cent percent literacy, even for its women. In today's context, however, the institution of an all-woman college is surrounded by the 'co-educationist lobby'.

It must be noted that co-educational and single-sex women's colleges fulfil different needs. While the co-educational college provides the environment for a lively interaction between the sexes in the course of obtaining degrees, the first and foremost practical consideration which women's colleges cater to is the gap in high level education between the sexes which needs to be filled before the country can achieve any kind of social progress. Apart from this the case for these

Single sex institutions also help to bring forward a lot of women in whose communities free interaction with men is still a taboo. Indeed, the discourse provided to such women once they enter such institutions of higher learning often help them to later overcome these taboos.

colleges can be based on a number of subtle, but distinct roles which they play in the growth of women as individuals. The earlier mentioned differences between the sexes by social mores is one such issue. While many feel that a single sex institution does precisely the same thing, the case is actually the converse – the microcosm of a co-educational institution often reflects the patriarchal set-up of the macrocosm. If not through overt discrimination, it is very often through pseudo-protective chivalric codes that women in co-ed colleges are kept away from important or difficult tasks, and consequently, from the mainstream of their vibrant co-curricular scene. A single-sex college catering to women posits a counter-culture – there being no male students means that the responsibility and experience gained from organisation and participation in various activities must come to women students. There is also a conscious attempt in many such colleges, our own Lady Shri Ram College being a prime example, to propagate a qualitatively different discourse about the location of a young woman in the social set-up, allowing her to think in terms of an independent identity not based on patriarchal approval.

It is often argued that studying in a women's college causes loss of confidence and courage when it comes to dealing with the 'real' world, the fierce competitive nature of 'the world of men'. It is felt that single-sex colleges over protect and therefore prevent natural gender interaction by providing a very 'controlled environment'. While some women's institutions may provide a more protected environment than co-ed colleges, considering the fears and apprehensions which some parents – and their daughters – may have about attending institutions of higher learning (often in a city different from one's home-town), such institutions provide them with a sense of security. It also helps to bring forward a lot of women in whose communities free interaction with men is still a taboo. Indeed, the discourse provided to such women, once they enter such institutions of higher learning, often helps them to later overcome these taboos.

As far as the fears about confidence are concerned, our experience at Lady Shri Ram bear a square refutation of them. When we first came to college, like all young people straight out of school, our identities were not yet established. In this women's college we found the opportunity to simply be ourselves without worrying about how students of the opposite sex might react and without the need to present oneself in a particular manner. This, of course, is not to simplistically imply that women in co-ed colleges are forever seeking male approval or



PRIYA M KATHARE

behaviour in the presence of the opposite sex does come about for many young people (of both sexes).

An all-women's college provides the space to look at oneself as one actually exists, or as one is made to exist in a gender-biased society. It may be the one place which provides a chance to shatter popular stereotypes of what is feminine and what is not or even challenge some ideas of gender relationships which have always been taken for granted - all this arising from a space which allows a young woman the space for an unattached individual identity - not as a daughter, wife, girl-friend or sister but an individual in her own right. Perhaps there is something to be said for their 'controlled environment', after all!

After all, it is with the confidence of self-awareness and self-knowledge that one develops the skills to deal with the real world. Besides, it is incorrect to assume that there is no interaction with men because the world outside the college confines still exists - and must be gone into - for various reasons. The years at LSR saw us avail of the opportunities to realise our own organisational potential. Along with our friends we worked at raising funds, getting phones installed, printing posters and

handling publicity campaigns and getting inter-college events successfully off the floor. The confidence developed from such knowledge and experience of handling everything without seeking support and direction from men friends is what gives young women the confidence to carry it over to the 'real world' and deal with it on their own terms. A single sex institution gives young women the opportunity to hold positions of leadership and high level responsibility as opposed to a large number of co-ed colleges where women are often denied even equality of opportunity in mainstream activities, a fact which many women even in most co-educational colleges will vouch for.

Women's colleges also provide the opportunity for the sense of community and the kind of network which earlier were restricted to the 'old boys' networks of co-ed colleges. The alumni associations of many women's colleges including LSR, boasts an impressive list of alumni and provides avenues for professional networking and interaction.

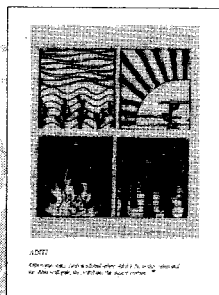
Thus, as mentioned before, given the importance of women's education for the purpose of women's emancipation and consequently an unbiased order, the case for women's colleges is justified, if for nothing else, by the fact that they provide the opportunity for many more women to realise their potential.

Single sex colleges may be just what is needed to mature society into seeing that being a 'woman of substance' does not mean for a woman to turn herself into a second class man ignoring her psychological and physiological characteristics, but being what she, as a woman wants to be - a freedom which society may very often deny in the 'real' world.

Shuchi Sinha is doing her final year English Honours and is also the current College Union President. She is the Secretary of the Debating and Creative Writing Societies and won the Daulat Rai M. Desai Prize for Leadership.

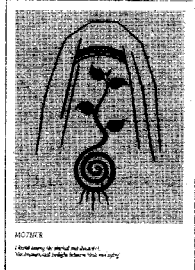
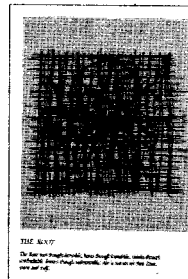
Tanvi Gautam is doing her final year Sociology. She is the President of the English Debating Society and Co-ordinator of the Academic Forum. She has won the Shri Ram Prize for All Round Students Excellence. Both Study at the Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi.

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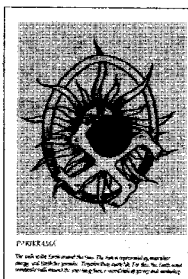


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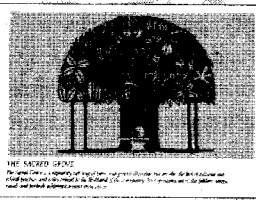


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the right to life, the highest
standard of health, nutrition.

THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION
freedom from all forms of exploitation,
abuse inhuman or degrading treatment
and neglect

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT
the right to education, support for early
childhood development and care, social
security and the right to leisure, recreation
and cultural activities

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION
respect for the views of the child, freedom
of expression, access to appropriate
information, and freedom of thought,
conscience and religion.

ISSUED IN THE INTEREST OF THE GIRL CHILD

THE FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN CULTURE BY SRI AUROBINDO

A COMMENTARY

MAKARAND PARANJAPE

PART I:

IS INDIA CIVILIZED SECTION 2

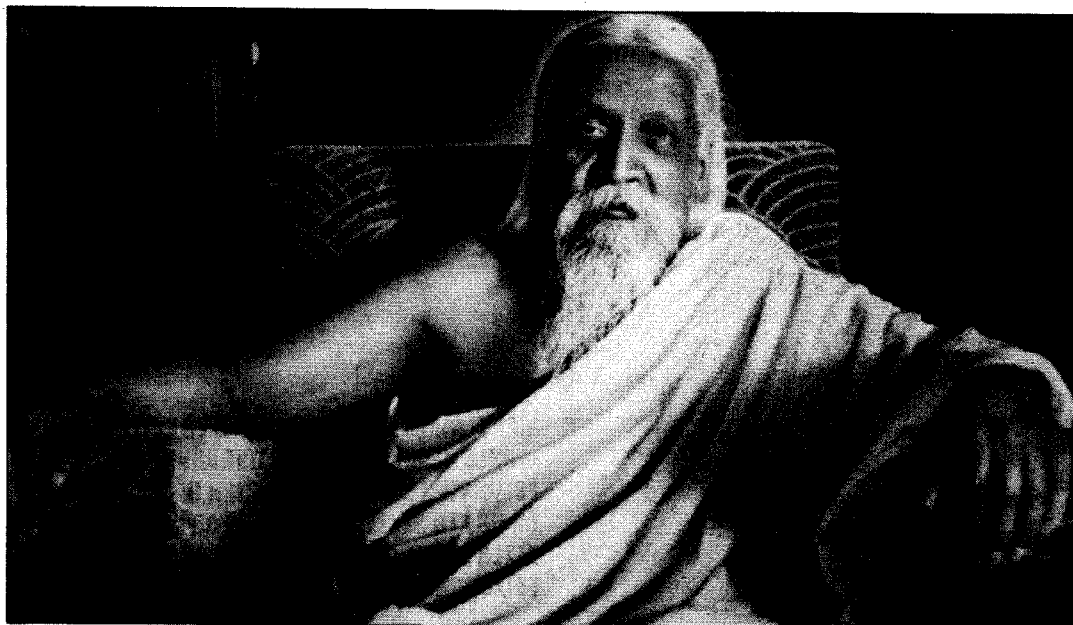
Towards the end of the first section of the series, in the last issue of THE EYE 'Is India Civilized,' Sri Aurobindo had called for an aggressive spirituality instead of a weak-kneed defence of Indian culture. Only such an aggressive spirituality would be able to save India from the might of a materialistic and rationalistic modern civilization. In Section 2 of the series, Sri Aurobindo takes these ideas and issues further. Only a culture which is

willing to uphold and declare the superiority of the spiritual ideal can emerge successful in this clash of civilizations, he argues. If you speak only of the co-existence or parity between these two opposing ways of living, then you have already admitted defeat.

He starts Section 2 with fundamental questions about the future of humanity: "Does the future of humanity lie in a culture founded solely upon reason and science?" or does it lie in the seeking of 'divine inner perfection?' Sri Aurobindo, once again contrasts the main thrust of the West with that of India. The former has accepted the 'formula of an intelligently mechanised civilisation supporting a rational and utilitarian culture' whereas the latter believes in a 'spiritualised civilisation striving through the perfection but also through an exceeding of mind, life and body towards a high soul-culture.'

Here, Aurobindo alludes to the European notion of progress, which has been important since the Enlightenment. By making Reason supreme, they thought they could control nature. Thus, through experiment, verification, and empiricism, you get progressively more and more powerful. At least in principle, its vistas are limitless. No other goal can be conceived of or achieved. Is this the purpose of life—this 'formula of an intelligently mechanised civilisation supporting a rational and utilitarian culture'? You can see how in these few words, Sri Aurobindo sums up the whole civilisational aspiration of the West.

We must remember that today, we no longer believe in the doctrine of unlimited progress. We have seen that the earth and its resources cannot last forever. That's why we have started talking about sustainable development these days. Until we breakthrough another frontier, say, space, we cannot return to



The Foundations of Indian Culture is a text made up by collecting three series of essays by Sri Aurobindo which originally appeared in the quarterly Arya from December 1918 to January 1921. The series consisted of three themes: Is India Civilized?, A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture and A Defence of Indian Culture. Another essay, Indian Culture and External Influence, published in the Arya of March 1919 was also included in the book. The book was first published in 1953 by the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York.

What follows is an edited transcript of Makarand Paranjape's talks on the book, delivered at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi, during the Sunday satsang. All quotations are from the SABCL facsimile edition published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

In this the 125th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, THE EYE will serialise Paranjape's commentaries on the subsequent chapters of the book.



the older idea. Then you may argue that the problems of the earth may find a solution in another planet. For instance, we have overpopulation on earth. So we can take a bunch of people and send them off to Mars or wherever. But I think these are distant dreams, and, moreover, even then, the question which Aurobindo raises are still valid.

It's very important at this point to understand what Sri Aurobindo means by the spiritual ideal. He doesn't mean that we renounce all our material comforts and achievements. For him the spiritual ideal does not deny the material, but exceeds it, it exceeds life, body, and mind, to a higher level of realization. In other words, we have to remember that India does not deny the mind, the intellect, or the importance of rationality; only, it is not prepared to give it primacy or sovereignty in the conduct of human affairs. Aurobindo also makes the point that by the standpoint with which the West now judges the Indian past as barbaric, much of Europe's own past, including a great deal of Greek culture, would be semi-barbaric. What, however, is important is not that we were as civilised or more civilised than them, but that without denying or rejecting reason or science, the Indian mind believes that the real truth 'goes beyond them.'

We face these problems everyday as Mirambika parents. Mirambika is a primary school run on different lines. When we send our children to a free-progress school, we are worried about whether they will be able to survive in a competitive world, whether they will be able to make it to IIT, or Medical College, or into an MBA. But, even here, the idea is not to achieve integral development at the *expense* of intellectual development. Both should go hand in hand. True, if the stress on the intellectual is so great that it begins to distort the growth of a child, then we shall have to make a choice.

But, the idea is not to create an escape, an alternative, but to include and exceed what is available in the world. That is to say, the lower levels of human consciousness, the physical, the vital, the psychic, and the mental should be rejected, that we should accept defeat, and then try to grow spiritually. We must meet the standards of the ordinary world and then go beyond them. Aurobindo's *yoga* is not a refuge for the weak; it is meant to make you strong, to go beyond your human limitation. That is, first you have to become a man (or a woman) and then try to become 'divine'. If you can't achieve even humanity, of what use is all this talk of spirituality? Becoming 'divine' does not mean that you are incapable of becoming human and so you want to become something else. You can aspire for the 'divine' only if you can exceed the normal expectations of human beings.

For Aurobindo the spiritual ideal does not deny the material, but exceeds it, it exceeds life, body, and mind, to a higher level of realization. In other words, we have to remember that India does not deny the mind, the intellect, or the importance of rationality; only, it is not prepared to give it primacy or sovereignty in the conduct of human affairs.

Now, Aurobindo backtracks to the two kinds of attacks on Indian civilization. On the one hand, there are people who believe that all of Indian civilisation is barbaric. But such people are in a minority. Then, there's a slightly more sophisticated version of this argument. Here, they say that only ancient India was great, but the present is an abomination. So all our greatness is located in some golden age in the distant past. All the major indologists seemed to subscribe to this belief. Even Max Mueller, possibly the greatest of them, had a dread of the present India. It is interesting to note that he never visited India, thought much of his work connected him to our country. Similarly, if you read the writings of Karl Marx, he often speaks of the 'civilized world,' by which he essentially meant Europe and North America. India is not a part of this civilised world. For Marx, British imperialism was the agent of history, which would destroy the barbaric despotisms that prevailed in India. A lot of Indians themselves subscribe to the idea that India was once very glorious, but now we need to modernise and westernise. In a way, even Nehru believed that. This second kind of attack is more insidious.

For Aurobindo, this is not enough. This is like a weak defence. We need to make our spirituality the keynote of our lives, not keep it as a watered down ideal prevalent only in the past. Moreover, argues Aurobindo, for a variety of reasons, the gulf between India and Europe seems less profound today than it did earlier. One reason for this is that Eastern spirituality itself



has made vital inroads into western culture. There has been considerable interest in Indian spirituality after the translation of Indian texts into English. A whole host of western thinkers including Shopenhauer and Emerson have taken India seriously. Movements like *Theosophy*, born out of the West's internal discontent, have done

European poetry and art are also showing a greater sensitivity to India. If such trends continue, then the cultural and civilisational gap between them and us is bound to become narrower.

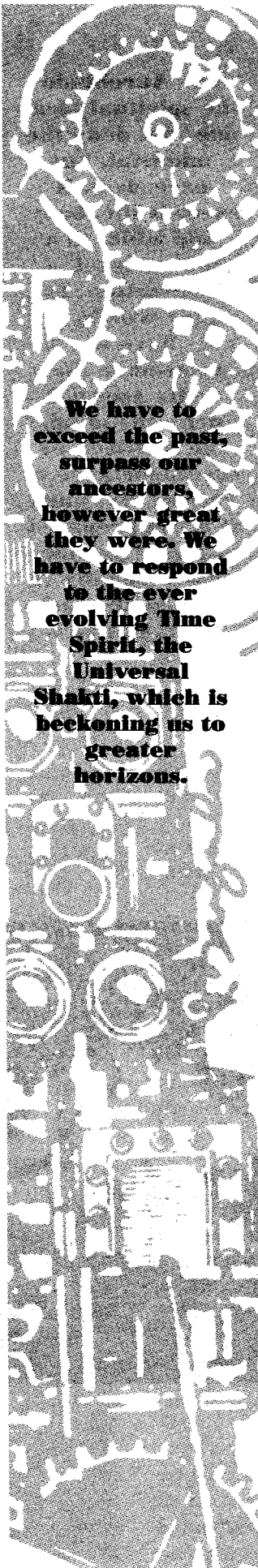
But, if so, it may be argued, what is the need 'of an aggressive defence of India or any defence at all?' The need persists, according to Aurobindo, because of the prevailing dominance of European civilisation. Under such circumstances, a 'rationalised and Westernised India, a brown ape of Europe, might emerge out of the chaos,' and 'ancient India would have perished.' While many will welcome such a transformation, it will, result not only in a great loss for India but for humanity.

For Aurobindo, India is important because the highest truths are more real and important to us than the physical, material reality. While Europe tends to live 'from below upward and from out inward,' India sees the Absolute as the reality, while the relative is only an illusion. Even if we concede that the physical, vital, and mental energy of the West needs to combine with the psychic and spiritual impulse of India in order to bring about a perfection and fruition of the human endeavour, it would still be obvious that there is an urgent need to preserve and retain the key features of Indian civilization. Hence, the renewed need for an aggressive defence.

But while the need of such a defence may be accepted, we may go wrong in the manner in which we conduct it. Aurobindo points out that a 'stubbornly static defence' would only lead us to a kind of Calvinism, a puritannical attempt at futile revivalism. There is something not just misguided but illogical about such a defence: 'It amounts to an attempt to sit stubbornly still while the *Shakti* of the world is rapidly moving on her way. . . It is a determination to live only on our past cultural capital . . . but to live on our capital without using it for fresh gains is to end in bankruptcy and pauperism.' That, indeed, is never the way in which Indian traditions have worked.

The other option, which Aurobindo has already discussed and rejected, would be to fly into the arms of Europe, surrendering our unique identity and role.

As opposed to these two reactions, an aggressive defence 'implies a new creation.' This, to me is the most significant aspect of this section. Here, Aurobindo gives the *mantra* of how to deal with our present chaos and confusion. His ideas, obviously, are as relevant today as they were when this essay was written. Even today we see a basic confusion in our values and identities. We don't quite know who we are or what we should do. We see an old world breaking down, falling apart before our eyes, but don't know how to



**We have to
exceed the past,
surpass our
ancestors,
however great
they were. We
have to respond
to the ever
evolving Time
Spirit, the
Universal
Shakti, which is
beckoning us to
greater
horizons.**

build a new one. Some of us take refuge in religious fanaticism, trying not only to cling to the pieces of the past, but to revive it according to some inaccurate and romantic notions. Present contingencies result in a distorted reading of our past. Histories are being rewritten to suit political exigencies. Communalism, fundamentalism, casteism and the polarization of society into opposing groups is the result.

Those who are alarmed by the growing intolerance in our society call for a greater dosage of faded and futile European values. Forgetting that the Enlightenment can never be separated from the sordid history of European expansionism and imperialism, these sections of our society seek pure forms of European influence to tide us over our present crisis.

Aurobindo knows that the embrace of the West is deadly. He also knows that revivalism is equally unproductive and futile. What he advocates instead is a new creation. What is the new creation? It implies, to begin with, that we can neither rest on our past laurels, nor content ourselves with believing that we had, in some dim bygone century, attained to the highest goals of existence. What it requires is a greater boldness, greater courage, greater self-confidence. We have to exceed the past, surpass our ancestors, however great they were. We have to respond to the ever evolving Time Spirit, the Universal *Shakti*, which is beckoning us to greater horizons.

If we fail to protect ourselves and to exceed our past, whatever good there was in our own civilisation will only survive as a subsidiary part of western civilisation. For the West is as busy in appropriating what it considers the best in our culture. Even the conqueror often ends up being conquered by the culture of the defeated country. But in this case, apart from such a counter-influence, the West is very aware of what is useful to it in our culture. So, it is no use, complaining about our subjection while enriching the West all the time. Aurobindo's observations are valid. If you want to learn about Egypt, you have to go to the British Museum in London or the Metropolitan Museum in New York. There, whole pyramids have been shipped and re-assembled. The Philadelphia Museum and the Los Angeles Country Museums have great collections of Indian sculpture. The Art Institute in Chicago, similarly, has vast collections of Indian miniatures. What all this means is that, eventually, we will end up believing that the only good things about ourselves are those which have been preserved and accepted by the West.

Aurobindo says, "What we have to do is to front the attack with new and more powerful formations which will not only throw it back, but even, where that is possibly helpful to the race, carry the war into the assailant's country." For this, what we need is not 'haphazard borrowing' or a 'stark appropriation' of the West's methods and machines, but a 'successful assimilation.' Sri Aurobindo

concludes the section by saying, "A mastering and helpful assimilation of new stuff into an eternal body has always been in the past a peculiar power of the genius of India." In other words, it is only natural for us to respond in this synthesizing, integral way, for that is the genius of India. What needs to be done is not alien to us, but it is simply to own up our natural tendencies to handle and offset cultural colonialism.

Section 2, thus, at once frees us from the burden of the past, encourages us to face the future with greater energy and self-confidence, and shows us a clear way to achieve these goals. To defend our culture, we need not become fanatics. Only insecure minds will slip into such postures. Nor need we, out of a sense of failure and inferiority, rush into the arms of our adversaries, surrendering our culture and civilisation at their feet. Instead, we need to study, to absorb, to assimilate what we find useful both in our past and in the adverse present, before we move on, with greater strength and poise, to a brighter future.

Makarand Paranjpye is one of India's leading poets. He has been published widely in areas of criticism, fiction and translation. He has also edited anthologies of poetry. He was awarded the Homi Bhaba Fellowship for literature in 1991. Currently he is Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.
Photos : Courtesy Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi.



PRIMAL DARK



Woman is the possessor of secret dark and emptiness. She is the luring huntress of light and man's fullness who fills her emptiness and reveals the secret.

In her primal dark is the deep origin and secret wisdom for which man searches. She is the receiver of him and the bearer of his wisdom.

In woman he finds what is beyond thinking's struggle.



SCULPTURE OF THE ISSUE

Mithuna 3

There is a beautiful relationship between sculpture and literature. *Sringara* was a prominent theme in Indian literature and the *mithuna* is a motif of *sringara* in sculptural form. The portrayal of *mithunas* gradually acquired an artistic and sensuous character. These sensuous themes akin to the *nayaka-nayika bhava* of Sanskrit and Prakrit poetry fulfilled the demands of the discerning.

There were works especially and exclusively dealing with *sringara*. Of these Hala's *Gathasaptasati* in Prakrit, a composition circa third century AD and Amaru's *Sataka*, circa seventh century AD, deserve attention, as they present miniature pictures of the emotional states of the *nayaka* and *nayika* in 'solitary self-standing verse'. These themes could have easily caught the fancy and imagination of a sculptor who would then translate them into *mithuna* motifs in sculpture. In fact, a couple from Nagarjunakonda represents in sculpture a popular poetic image which Amaru has beautifully rendered in a verse:

A house parrot overheard the words that were murmured at night, in confidence, by a young pair of lovers. In the morning it began to repeat them loudly before the elders.

Filled with shame, the young wife stayed his speech by placing in his beak a piece of ruby from her earring on the pretext of giving him seeds of pomegranate.

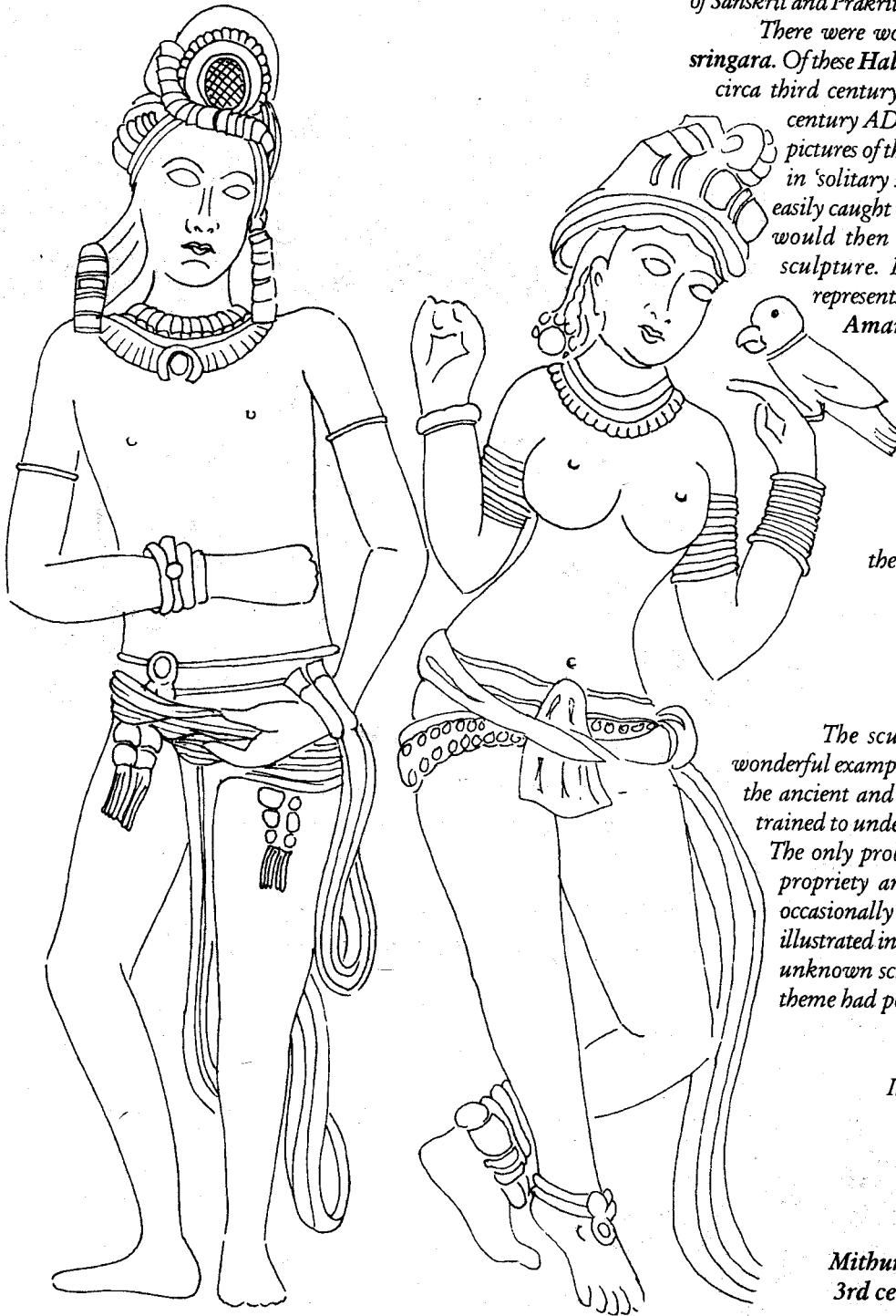
Amarusataka-15

The sculptural representations of the verse are wonderful examples of love in union, *sambhoga sringara*. In the ancient and medieval periods, parrots were commonly trained to understand and speak the language of the period. The only problem was that this species had no notion of propriety and possibly created some very funny and occasionally embarrassing real-life situations. This is best illustrated in this verse and realistically translated by some unknown sculptor into stone. This may suggest that the theme had popular acceptance.

Prabhakar Begde

Illustration: Indrani Sen

Mithuna Ikshvaku,
3rd century AD, Nagarjunakonda



A HUMAN RACE

ANU MAJUMDAR



The Amalgamate Management – Once a little ahead in the present, the world faced a strange dilemma, God outpaced everything. All the time. It was frustrating. The Ego, in abundant supply across the planet, was miffed. So the Management offered a challenge to God in the form of a seminar. Their plan was to first somehow extract God's secret and then show Him his rightful place in the Universe. However, even their best laid plans were constantly foiled.

Miss World – From India, was employed by the Management to act as a spy and find out God's secrets. She did. It was a special Speed. But since the Management was slow to react when she returned and generally missed the whole point, both Miss World and the secret slipped through their fingers and disappeared. When they realised their mistake it was too late and so a frantic hunt began.

Nachiketas – Immortal souls as we know, have a free passport into life whenever they want. Nachiketas, the young hero of the *Katha Upanishad*, who once earned three boons from Yama, the God of Death decided to return to earth. He landed in Calcutta and began life as a newspaper vendor. He read about Miss World's encounter with the God(s) and was intrigued. He wrote to her. They met, became friends. With his help, Miss World took a trip through the Vedas and Upanishads, encountering several ancient and modern seers, which helped her understand God's speed better. In turn she brought Nachiketas upto date with Star TV, Internet and the search for the God Particle. However, since the Amalgamate Management was after Miss World, both of them had to be on the run.

God – Singular or plural. Both or none according to demand. Having masterminded all the events, they watch the play of the world unfold. They act in various ways. They offer effective, though unconventional consultancy to Miss World. They even arrange things so that Nachiketas can help her further. At the same time God makes sure that the discontent of the Amalgamate Management is well fanned with furor, so that they never give up their search. Because God has a plan for them too...

The Story of Episode 1 The Context

One day it was discovered that God ran really fast. In spite of their best efforts the mortals were being continuously outpaced. This left them all a bit discontented. Their resentment grew louder and louder till its rumblings echoed in the corridors of the United Nations headquarters. The Security Council decided to take matters into its own hands and immediately dashed off a letter to the Gods inviting them to participate in a seminar entitled – *Who Will win the Race?*

However their response to the invitation was lukewarm but when they were pressed, they agreed, provided New Delhi was the venue. The Council was shocked since everything was wrong with it (power cuts, water shortage etc) and maybe the Gods were even biased (pro-India and all that) ! In fact, they were all over the place, in Palestine, Disneyland, and the Rohtang Pass. The United Nations got worried. What were the Gods up to! Finally the C.I.A. was summoned. They came up with the ingenious idea of using Miss World as a spy to get to the truth.

Miss World, with some difficulty, finally located the Gods at the Mc Donalds next to the U.N. headquarters in New York. She managed to glean the truth from them. They told her how humans were all journeying through error and ignorance to perfection.

They would reach their own godheads inevitably, but for this they needed speed. They taught her this speed and Miss World was thrilled at the revelation. It was so simple and to the point!

The Gods sent a note through her to the Security Council. It read:

One unmoving that is swifter than Mind. That the Gods reach not, for it progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In that, the Master of Life establishes the waters.

Isba Upanishad

The Secretary General and the other members were disgusted – what a senseless note! Everyone groaned – they had lost the race.

In New Delhi, the euphoria settled into gloom leaving all the members of parliament and the bureaucrats disappointed. But, surprisingly, God was reported to be somewhere near Delhi playing in a forest once known as Brindavan. For some odd reason, New Delhi's request for entry into the Security Council was being reconsidered.

Episode 2: The Alliance

Even as Miss World leaves the U.N building, the media goes crazy about her. Intrigued by what he reads between the lines, Nachiketas writes to her and a formal meeting is arranged at the Nachiketas Newstand in Calcutta. Despite Miss World's fabulous sense of *haute couture* and Nachiketas's severe lack of it, they recognise each other across barriers of time and become friends. Hundreds of people gather to catch a glimpse of Miss World and hear her speak about things of ultimate importance. Next morning, however, the papers announce the sinister hunt for Miss World. The allies decide to escape, incognito.

Miss World shut the door behind her softly and took the elevator

the Security Council chambers to the lobby downstairs. No one noticed. To be honest, no one cared. God had tricked them all once again. It was an insult. The management did not even bother to thank their spy for her efforts in the top-secret assignment.

Outside the U.N. building Miss World hailed a taxi and returned to Broadway. The space-shuttle was still safe and unnoticed behind the large Kodak sign in blue and yellow neon. Miss World opened a hatch, stepped inside the craft and blasted off discreetly from Broadway.

But a young CNN reporter acting on a tip-off from a man at McDonald's, who called himself McGod, arrived on the scene just as the shuttle started to go up. The reporter raced towards the spot, pulled out his video camera and filmed the space-shuttle as it rose gracefully over the Kodak sign and shot up through the high rise forest of New York into the big grey sky. He raced back to the studio, barged into the chief's room and showed him the tape. It was a scoop. Half an hour later the top-secret story was out.

Miss World picked up the news story as the shuttle went into orbit. She altered the flight plan immediately. *Non-stop Orbit Till Further Command*. She was in no mood to land. There would be hordes of reporters everywhere. She leaned back and rested her head against the cushioned head-rest, reflecting. A few weeks ago she had been just another routine beauty queen. Then she met God. With sudden anguish she realised that life would never be the same again. The TV screen was flashing again, it said: "Don't sulk". And it was signed McGod. Miss World sat up grinning.

Many thousand miles below, a pair of immortal eyes detected a silver flash in the sky. In a blip it was gone. "Ah there she goes again", he murmured. "Third orbit".

When immortals like Nachiketas take up

residence on earth, sometimes after several thousand years, there are a few jerky explanations to be made usually for the benefit of inquisitive, though fairly gullible mortals.

When Nachiketas decided to take a temporary working-vacation on Earth, he chose, for some unknown reason, the city of Calcutta. In particular, he chose a little corner near the Rashbehari Avenue and Garihat Road crossing to set up his newstand, next to Ghosh Babu's *Sweet and Snack* shop. Naturally the question followed, "Where from?"

This usually implied background, ancestry, father's name, marital status, preferred football team etc. Nachiketas had the perfect reply.

"N.R.I." he said with a little flick of his head pointed vaguely eastward or sometimes westwards, "out there."

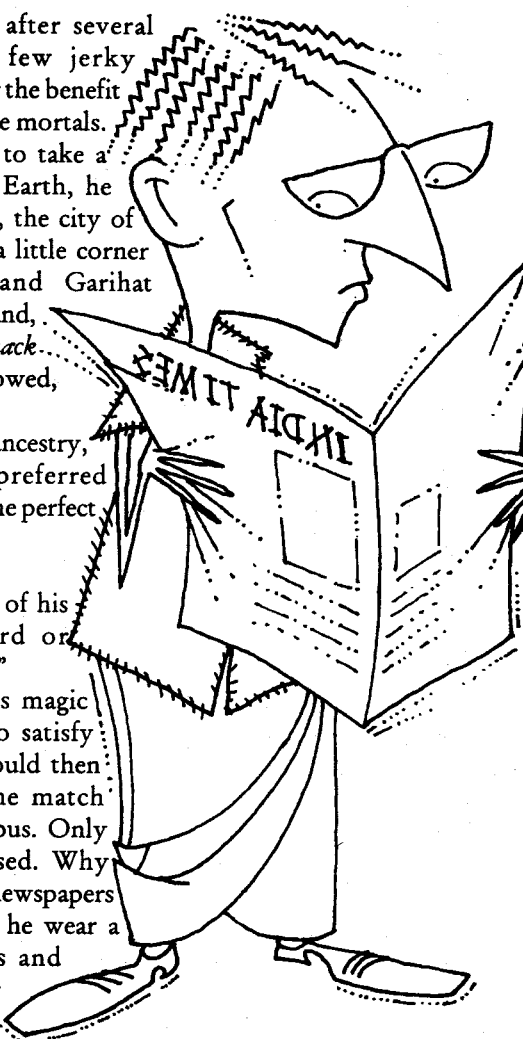
Non-Resident Indian. This magic combination of words seemed to satisfy most people's curiosity. They would then buy the day's paper, discuss the match forecasts and hurry to catch the bus. Only Mrs Banerjee's curiosity increased. Why should a loaded NRI want to sell newspapers on the Garihat corner? Why did he wear a *dhoti* and shirt instead of jeans and Reeboks? And why did he wear those doughty old bi-focals, and not Ray Bans? Highly suspicious. Still, he was tall and healthy, almost handsome. She had noticed how her niece Sushmita had looked at him the other day. Rathinda said he was a very intelligent boy. In that case he could well be a catch for Sushmita. But what was he doing at that newstand? She would really have to find out a bit more about his wealth and circumstance. So the next morning, on her way to the market she stopped by.

Nachiketas was sitting on the little stool next to his stand, reading the *Indian Times*. "Nachiketas Babu, *nomoshkar!* Tell me, what was it like 'out there'?"

"Immortal" said Nachiketas, without looking up from the paper.

Mrs. Banerjee was a voting communist. She secretly denounced this snub as elitist and unproletarian and began to buy her regular copy of *Star-Bust* from Gol Park thereafter.

The media, meanwhile, went crazy over Miss World. She stared out of every magazine cover in colour, and black and white in newspapers. She was seen cutting ribbons at galas, speaking at charities, waving out of her car, always with that fabulous smile. All around the world people now knew her favourite lipstick, perfume and designer labels. Her opinion was



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Everyone recognised her. Nachiketas had to push and elbow through the crowd to reach her. Finally he stood before the fabulous lady in a crimson and white sari. There were little designer lion-heads along the crimson border. "Miss World, I presume?"

asked on how to eradicate poverty and raise the standard of education. Hardly anyone bothered to ask her about God. Everyone had heard the unanimous verdict of the management. "The Gods must be crazy", they said.

Nachiketas began to notice the weariness in her eyes. She had been offered modelling contracts by Coke and Pepsi and Dabur Chyavanpras, which she refused and four offers from Hollywood which she also refused. She said she had "no plans". It was getting curiouser and curiouser. And when a reporter asked her once more how she would change the world, she said, "organic respiration."

Nachiketas laughed till he cried. So the kid had learned something after all. He read another interview of hers by a feminist group. Miss World told them, "to recognise myself as a woman only, is to admit a crisis of identity. It encourages limitation and all the usual problems. To recognise myself as a complete human being instead, is the beginning of identity." It seemed that the feminist group was outraged by this un-partisan view. They attacked her for wearing swimsuits by the poolside.

Nachiketas decided it was time to make contact. He wrote to her, Dear Madam, I am very interested to know more about your encounter with the Gods and learn what they told you about speed. Since the media has failed to inform us, would you be willing to come to Calcutta and tell me and may be a few others about it?

A prompt reply arrived. She thanked Mr Nachiketas for his invitation and would be delighted to come to Calcutta. She sent him her on-line address. Nachiketas hurried to explain the situation.

The Saturday evening *adda* to which she was going to be invited was a spontaneous weekly gathering of regulars and passersby. People gathered around the steps of Ghosh Babu's *Sweets and Snacks* and the evening ripened with conversation and debate. Poetry and political manifestos, jokes, songs and the cricket score. It was an open forum for anything from Neruda to nuclear war, from Brahma to Bill Gates. Nachiketas didn't say that he was usually the referee and the last word on all subjects. In fact he outdid all the others in hard-core street rap. Instead, he hastened to explain to Miss World that there would be no fat cheque for this appearance at Garihat. No contract. All she could expect was a chair to sit on and possibly some *rosogollas*.

Miss World was thrilled to bits. Nachiketas broke the news to Ghosh Babu with great tact.

Predictibly, Ghosh Babu shrieked with excitement when everything finally registered. His *Sweets and Snacks* world suddenly opened to a wider horizon. He immediately offered his own chair from behind the cash desk for Miss World. He offered Didima's room, where Miss World could stay for the night. He offered *rosogollas*, tea with cardamon for the lady and *mishti doi*!

"And remember Ghosh Babu, top secret!"

"Tip-top!" Ghosh Babu assured him.

So arrangements were made were made quietly. Ghosh Babu prepared extra quantities of sweets and snacks. His entire family was in on this 'top secret'. They went about their chores barely able to conceal the shivers of excitement. Finally on Saturday morning Nachiketas casually hung a banner in front of his news stand.

MISS WORLD AT NACHIKETAS' NEWSTAND TONIGHT!
TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ON GOD, SPEED AND THE COSMOS!
EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW BUT COULDN'T ASK!
COME ONE COME ALL!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT FROM GHOSH'S SWEETS AND SNACKS!

Ghosh Babu rubbed his hands. He would go down in history. When people began to pass by for the morning paper, there were many open mouths. But mostly a lot of bewilderment and disbelief. Nachiketas only said "Come and see".

That afternoon he went to pick her up at the Howrah station. She came out of the train wearing swanky sunglasses. Not a very effective disguise. Everyone recognised her. Nachiketas had to push and elbow through the crowd to reach her. Finally he stood before the fabulous lady in a crimson and white sari. There were little designer lion-heads along the crimson border.

"Miss World, I presume?"

"Nachiketas?"

He nodded. She continued to stare at him.

"The Nachiketas...?"

It was flattering. To be recognised after three thousand years... He nodded again.

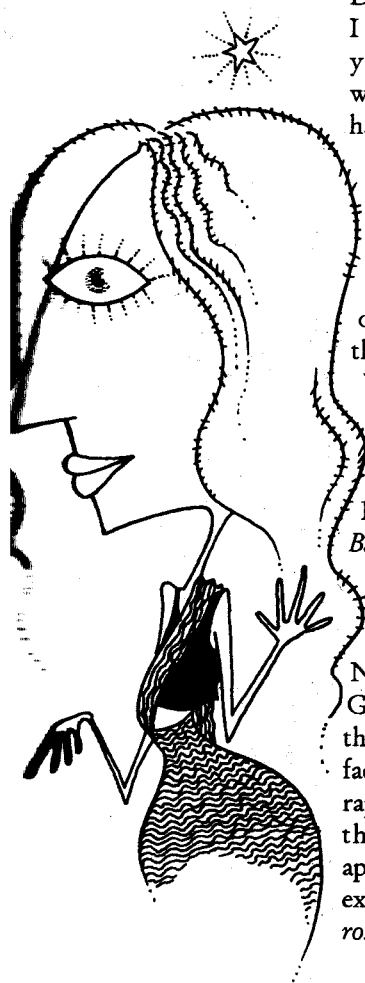
Her lips moved silently, but he could read what she was saying.

"May we have the strength to kindle the Agni of Nachiketas, for he is the bridge of those who do sacrifice. And he is Brahman Supreme and the Imperishable and the far shore of security for those who cross this Ocean...."*

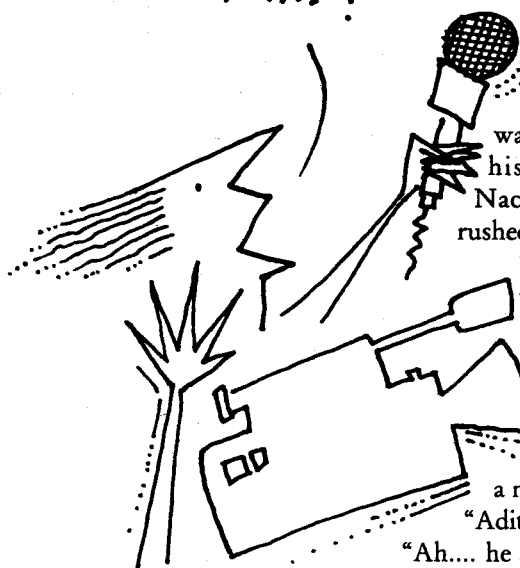
Aloud she said, "Must hear about all that

THE EYE a written word movement

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MADAM, DOES GOD HAVE A BEARD?



They smiled at each other like old friends. She looked at him critically again and shook her head.

"You'll have to do better than that Nachiketas. This post-Gandhian uniform is ridiculous!" She pointed to his dull white *dhori* and shirt, and took off her sunglasses.

The crowd was enchanted. But they glared at Nachiketas who was taking up all her attention with his terrible clothes. Quickly Nachiketas grabbed her hand and rushed her to the waiting taxi.

"Garihat!" said Nachiketas, as they got in.

The taxi driver spat on the road, shut the door and turned on the ignition. Nachiketas turned to Miss World.

"By the way Miss, do you have a name?"

"Aditi Singh."

"Ah.... he smiled, "Mother Lion! well this is the right town for you then".

News spread like fire as they arrived. People began arriving by the hundreds. College students, housewives, football players, businessmen, politburo members, shopkeepers, academics, executives, artists, poets, scientists, socialities. Cops, nuns and other busybodies. Even Ghosh Babu's Didima.

Acting on a tip off from a certain Shri Godbole Haribole, NDTV sent a small crew to cover whatever it was that was supposed to happen. There was a tremendous crowd. Later Ghosh Babu said it was the historic 'adda'. Miss World sat on his chair. People at the back shoved to get a better view and asked. "Is she really beautiful?" "Does she have buck teeth?" "What is Nachiketas saying?" etc.

In fact Nachiketas had raised his hands and was saying.

"Friends!, Miss Aditi Singh, better known as Miss World, is with us this evening. She came here specially to answer questions no one else thought of asking her." Here he paused for effect, "about God, His speed and the cosmos! The city of Calcutta will be the first to ask these questions, which no one else even thought of asking before". Another pause. "The city of Calcutta breaks another record!" he threw in lavishly.

The crowd roared as though they has scored a goal against the rest of the world.

"Friends, you have one hour". NDTV swung into action.

A hand went up

"Madam, does God have a beard?"

"Depends on the mood".

"Is He a woman?"

"Also".

"What did they say to you?" asked another.

"They told me about their speed..."

"You mean you know the secret then Miss World?" Surprised voice.

"Yes.. it is a special speed. Not unlike the velocity of our rockets but it is made of a different substance, let's say, it's grown from inside."

"How? Can you be a little more clear?"

"The only way I can decribe it for the moment is like this. The best way to grow it is by preparing a sort of access path inside, by which the Gods can enter and generate this speed. You can't access them, they access you, do you see...?"

Not many did. It sounded a bit far out. But she looked so wounderful they let her go on. ".... this inner path, is like a highway for the Gods. Even to build it requires tremendous speed...it is like the fire of Nachiketas. When a man has the fire of Nachiketas he thrusts away from him the meshes of the snare of death", she quoted steadily. "That kind of speed".

"So now you know how it works?" Doubtful voice.

"In a first-phase kind of way".

"Hummm...where are the papers?" Serious voice.

"There were none. What I had, a small note, I gave to the Security Council."

Then some one asked the ultimate question.

"Is God Mohun Bagan or East Bengal?"

"Pro-Football!" she yelled back.

People clapped and cheered lustily. The NDTV crew rushed back to the studios to get this scoop on the late evening news.

The Amalgamate Management called an emergency Panic Session. At the UN headquarters, all dustbins were asked to be searched at once. The piece of paper had been thrown away. Only the Secretary general kept calm and said they were pointing their fingers in the wrong direction. But the consensus was louder. The Secretary General let it pass. He had understood much from Miss World's interview.

Nachiketas was sleeping on the pavement as usual when the delivery boys arrived at 4.30 a.m. with the papers. He glanced at the headlines sleepily and sat up startled. The headlines screamed,

MISS WORLD GIVES ILLEGAL INTERVIEW!
CONCEALS SECRET FROM THE
MANAGEMENT! TREASON!

WHAT ACCESS PATH, DEMANDS THE
SCIENTIFIC HIERARCHY - IS THERE A
HIDDEN MICROFILM IN MISS WORLD?

MISS WORLD TO APPEAR BEFORE
GLOBAL TRIBUNAL. UNGRATEFUL, SAYS
CIA CHIEF!

SHAME ON THE COUNTRY SAYS
ACTIVIST!

"Madam, does God have a beard?"

"Depends on the mood".

"Is He a woman?"

"Also".

"What did they say to you?" asked another.

"They told me about their speed..."

Nachiketas rushed upstairs and hammered the door to Didima's room where Miss World slept. She opened the door groggily. Nachiketas thrust the newspapers in her hand.

"Yikes!" she said first. Then she said, "But God, what shall I do?"

Nachiketas suddenly understood why he had taken a working-vacation on Earth. He saw God's plan very clearly. He put an arm around her, "We are going to travel".

"Huh?"

"We are going to take a working-vacation, and disappear till everyone comes to their senses." he said firmly.

"But I can't."

"Why not?"

"I promised to open Rahul's gala evening at the Hyatt tomorrow evening as a surprise. Besides, I don't have any money to travel with me now, neither do you". She added sarcastically.

Nachiketas refrained from telling her that immortals did not use money to travel. She was agitated. He let it pass. Instead he said, "So? We go to Delhi. You open the gala. You pick up the cheque which will pay for our travels comfortably. But, starting right now, we go incognito".

"Incognito !" she looked at his face. "Nachiketas, those old bi-focals you have on. They're fake aren't they?"

He took them off grinning, revealing a very different pair of eyes. Almost another face. Aditi took the glasses in her hands and mused. They were terrible. Thick fake lenses in awkward red-brown frames. She winked at Nachiketas and put them on.

The next day headlines ran thus.

MISS WORLD DISAPPEARS! WORLD WIDE HUNT ON! INTERPOL ALERTED!

and the day after..

MISS WORLD OPENS FASHION GALA IN NEW DELHI! ESCAPES BEFORE INTERPOL ARRIVES! MANAGEMENT TO STEP UP OPERATIONS!

The report said that after mysteriously disappearing from Calcutta, Miss World surfaced the next evening to open a much publicised fashion event in the capital. She even walked the ramp with other models but by the time the Interpol arrived, she had already left. The organisers refused to comment and claimed not to know her whereabouts. A witness said she was with a well dressed gentleman, probably another model, but no one seemed to know him. When questioned at his Defence Colony residence, her worried father said she had called an hour ago to say she was fine but had left no forwarding address. The Management has expressed its frustration.

Opinion was divided about all this. Some felt Miss World had done wrong. Others found the charges ridiculous. Still others couldn't care less. In Calcutta, a procession was taken out in support of Miss World, while in the Delhi University campus 'Mother Lion' badges sold briskly.

Meanwhile it was being asked, where was God? They were keeping an eye on two people at the foothill of the Himalayas. The sky was clear and blue.

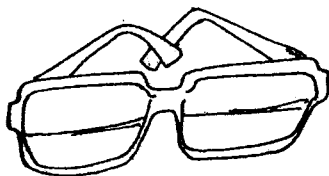
"Where are we going now?" she asked.

"To Saptarishi", said Nachiketas consulting the road map.

Anu Majumdar is a dancer-choreographer, poet and writer. She lives in Aizawl.

Illustrations: Rishabh Varma

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AMERICAN EGO-NOMICS

This story is about ego—most notably the American Ego, with a capital E. No offence is meant either wilfully or inadvertently to anyone, but before I begin to collapse on the the ground and roll with laughter at this goofy self-absorbed nation, whose antics I have had the privilege to observe for the past year and a half, I want you guys, to share in my amusement too.

Let's start with the simple movie, for instance. "What's in a movie?" you might ask. Well, gentle reader, I am referring specifically to last year's blockbuster hit *Independence Day*. For the uninitiated or those who came in late, the movie is about a bunch of spaceships from Mars (supposedly) which decide to zap the citizens and denizens of earth and reduce all to rubble. You might ask: "We're talking about zapping all of earth, so what's all this nonsense about American ego?" Hey, c'mon, I haven't even started yet! Anyway, to get to the point, Q: Where do the little green men attack first? Someplace in the US of A! Q: Where do the little slimeballs attack later in the movie? US of A: Q: Which noted world-famous monument do they zap to establish their superiority over us earthly twerps? No, not the Taj Mahal, dufus (though I hope it ranked a close second in their minds)! 'Tis the White House in Washington, D.C., the home of the American president! Q: Who owns the road ahead? Bill Gates! (Er, sorry that was a trick question). If you got all the questions right on the first try, I hope you are gifted shares in McDonald's. Continuing with movie musings, since the alien creeps have zinged quite a few large cities in the world according to America, and then some in the 'other' world, the American president, the leader of the Free World (hail, hail!) rises to the rescue! He mobilises American troops, and gets the other world leaders to stop laying eggs and send off forces too. Well, we don't see much of everyone else once the anti-alien war starts, but we do see two American heroes gain entry into a flying saucer, pulverize a whole nation of Martians, and save the day, yippeel! Of course, all of this happens on July, 4th, giving our

good President the perfect opportunity to tell the soldiers of the world "Today we celebrate our Independence Day!" This also gives the publicists a perfect opportunity, that of nicknaming the movie *ID-4*. Which gave rise to the following conversation before the start of the movie in a theater in India:

Bemused person "Why does everyone keep referring to the movie as *ID-4*, man?"

All-knowing person: "Hell, man, don't you know anything? They probably had an *ID-1*, an *ID-2* and an *ID-3* as movies before this one, just like the *Star Wars* trilogy!"

I think you are beginning to get the picture....

Let's move now to the subject of O.J. You ask: "O.J.? Orange juice? I drink that too!" Honestly, not-so-gentle reader, you ask too many question! I meant O.J. of O.J. Simpson, the American ex-football hero. Again for the uninitiated (God, you are ignorant of what's 'in' in Americaland), he's the chappie who murdered (yeah, yeah, we all know he dunit) his ex-wife and her boyfriend, then led the Los Angeles cops through a slow yet spirited car chase on the freeways, had the longest and most publicised court case I can recall, and then got off scot-free with a not-guilty verdict and a few million pounds poorer. Anyway, this American 'hero' got probably more publicity in these two years than Lady Di during all her married years. This case of 'immense significance and astounding proportions' became local news and national news, and edged out all international news. I put on the TV: hey, it's about the OJ case! I change the channels: it's still the OJ case. I pick up the LA Times: the front page (and most of the inside supplement) is dedicated to the OJ case! I decide to watch basketball: they interrupt with a brief message on the progress of the-you



Young peppy Swapna Sundaram is an architect studying in California. Here are some 'Swapnesian' views on the cosmos.



"HONEY, YOUR MAXI McABRE MUSHROOM IS HERE!"

guessed it—OJ case! Those two years and several million pounds later, that slimeball is playing golf on some verdant field and the press is back to reporting normal American disasters, but now and then his spectre creeps within the audio, video or written media in some evil form or other.

And then comes Americanese for what the Americans fondly yet erroneously refer to as 'English.' I'm sad to say that I've had to bow down to the pressure too, otherwise they would have locked me up in a padded cell. I'm referring to writing 'colour' as 'color,' 'honour' as 'honor,' 'programme' as 'program,' and pronouncing 'harass' as 'her-ass,' and 'route' as 'rout.' The list is endless, but wouldn't fit on this page. I work part-time as an Editorial Assistant in the UCLA Oral History Program, and oh boy, these are the errors you always have to watch out for when proof-reading, the kind that common folk might make. In fact, one of the recent issues of *Copy Editor* magazine was devoted to an argument between the merits and demerits of 'fulfillment' versus 'fulfilment!'

I get back from my trip to India in early January 1997, and on my way from the LA airport to my apartment, it's just my luck to get saddled with an overly garrulous taxi driver. He throws a question at me from the front as I am lolling tiredly, "Which country did you visit?" "India," I reply. He's obviously pleased. "I know a lot about India! I have many Indian friends." I tense, waiting for the inevitable 'exotic country' statements. But his next question takes me off-guard, "Isn't it a lot like Europe?" "What do you mean?" I demand. "Oh, all you guys drive on the wrong side of the road, and have the steering wheels on the wrong side too!" he said. In my sorry state of jet lag, I was in no mood to argue with such wise American logic!

I end here, having proven my point, and hope you are rollicking on the floor too. Meanwhile, I shall join the serpentine queue outside the local theater waiting to buy tickets for an 'exotic, unforgettably oriental and lushly erotic experience,' that of watching Mira Nair's latest *Kamasutra*....

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There is a new-found audience for the arts in urban India, because this is where fortunes are made, power and beds shared, and on the whole, the numbers game is played. Artists have never had it so good. If the fifties saw them struggling to revive traditional forms, the sixties saw them trying to serve the arts. The seventies brought them to professionalism, which the eighties put to good use through the *sarkari* Festivals, Utsavs and *tamashas*. The nineties is clearly the decade when art has become entertainment – a strange (and gross) admixture of artists, performers, money-bags and big patrons (read market).

Government patronage to the arts comes as a package with institutional framework, power, connections, land and grants. But pause a while and listen to that interminable drone... it is artists complaining that the government has done precious little for them. In a country where after fifty years of freedom, clean drinking water is still a luxury, let me add (even if it is a bit exaggerated) that there are some devotees of Saraswati who start their day with champagne. Artists are meant to create works of art – this is their chosen medium, their metier. It is essentially an act of 'self-indulgence'. It is only in this country that it takes the form of social work, as if in doing that they are, in effect, feeding the millions who live below the poverty line.

What relevance do the arts and artists have in this scenario? What is the role and function of the government? What should be the responsibility of the corporate world? Where does all this fit in with our 'culture'? Is culture a commodity that needs to be feted, wined and dined? This last Valentine's Day saw a never-before rush for roses and red wine. How has this change happened? Who has created the market for it? Having unleashed the package of gross capitalism, can we blame a card company like Archies for creating a market for adolescent sentimentalism? Ask questions, friends, after all this is your country (even if you secretly wish you lived abroad).

An institutional building is not a mere building made of cement, mortar and bricks. An 'institution' has to have a good reason for being. It has to have a purpose, a soul. An institution is an organic process. Today, artists are busy creating their own institutions; they don't need one. This is a strange business. An artist can create, to get embroiled in finance and management is a purely different matter. Artists who turn entrepreneurs do it at the cost of their own art. Very few artists can be their own managers, they need a wife or a lover or a godfather or mother for helping run their careers.

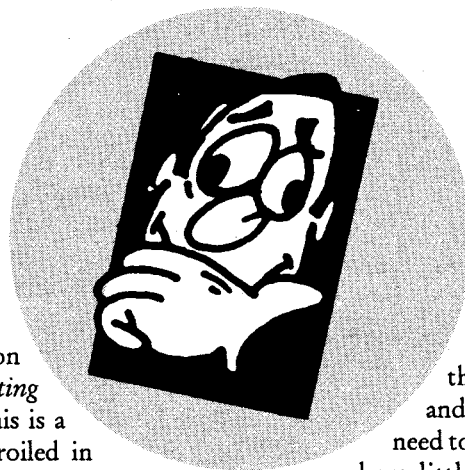
India has too many art institutions today but how many have made a mark? How many have produced a Ravi Shankar or a Balasaraswati? Rukmini Devi created Kalakshetra – look at the mess it is in today. Poet Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan is in shambles. The Kerala Kalamandalam is known more for its drunken orgies than Kathakali. Most senior gurus are gone. Others are reaching that stage. The stage itself is left to the second

best, to mediocrity, which has taken over with a vengeance.

Individuals too, who were named institutions unto themselves are fading. Can you count ten greats in any field? By greats I mean, inspiring and of world class stature in excellence. And who do we actually recognise as great people? I have been asking this question for aeons and sorry, the list is very small. Five, maybe ten individuals in any field is difficult to find in a country close to being the most populated. But we invite a Bill Gates to dine with a humble farmer (read fumble harmer) amidst much fanfare. What is Gates offering except opening his own pockets wider? Instead of investing in this poor country, he is not investing a single dollar of his fabled 300 billion or whatever. And Yanni – it is he who needs the Taj, not the other way around. He will sell the copyrights of his video, underwear and overwear to the highest bidder and publicise it worldwide, preferably on the web.

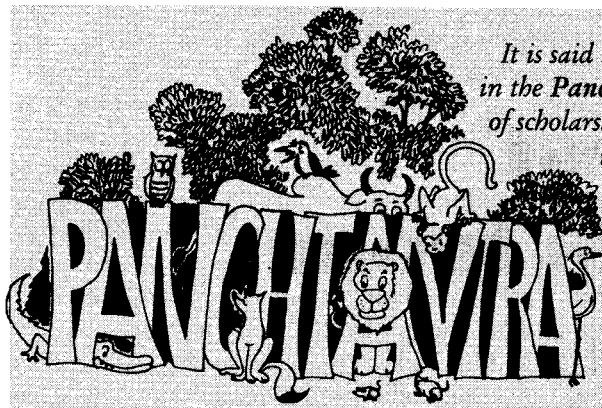
10⁰ SQUINT ASHISH KHOKAR

A column inspired by a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, popularly known as the School of Cynics. THE EYE places, amidst bundles of hope and idealism, one such cynic who will bash at ... well everything. We hope this column appeals to the diehard cynic who woke up in the morning, stubbed his toe and hated the world. The writer's views (which are expressed in a rather humorous tone) are his own (although we secretly agree with most of them).



the remains of the day, all you need is peace and harmony within yourself. For this you need to meditate in order to arrive at that point where little else matters. You become one with nothingness. *Shoonya* is everything. Aum, Allah, Amen!

Ashish Khokar finds life in India and Indians totally amusing. He is a full time writer anyway, so he does not know what more to do other than being the dance critic for the Times of India and columnist for First City, in addition to being a biographer, photographer and cultural administrator who served the Sahitya Kala Parishad, Festivals of India in France, Sweden, Germany and China, INTACH and Martand Singh Consultants. He also scripts and anchors TV programmes on the arts and edits a bi-monthly Rasamanjari.



It is said that an ounce of sense contained in the Panchatantra is better than a ton of scholarship. Most of us are familiar with it from our childhood as 'once-upon-a-time' stories and have read them in abridged forms or in comics. Rarely have we encountered a literal translation in verse form. Indeed, these wise verses, often epigrammatic in style, go to make the real

character of the Panchatantra. The stories are charming when regarded as pure narrative, but it is the beauty, wisdom and wit of the verses which lift the Panchatantra above the best story books.

The Panchatantra is a 'niti shastra' or textbook of 'niti'. The word 'niti' roughly means the 'wise conduct of life'. It is witty, mischievous and profoundly sane. The word, 'Panchatantra' means, the 'Five Books', the 'Pentateuch'. Each of the five books are independent, consisting of a framing story with numerous, inserted stories, told by one or another of the characters of the main narrative. The device of the framing story is familiar in oriental works, as in the Arabian Nights. The large majority of the actors are animals, who have, of course, a fairly constant character. Thus, the lion is strong, but dull of wit, the jackal, crafty, the heron stupid, the cat, a hypocrite. The animal actors present far more vividly and shrewdly undeceived and free of all sentimentality, a view, that piercing the humbug of every false ideal, reveals with incomparable wit the sources of lasting joy. And this is how it happened...

*One Vishnusharman shrewdly
gleaning
All wordly wisdom's inner meaning.
In these five books the
charm compresses
Of all such books the world
possesses.*

In the southern country is a city called Maiden's Delight. There lived a king named Immortal Power. He was familiar with all the works dealing with the wise conduct of life. His feet were made dazzling by the tangle of rays of light from jewels in the diadems of mighty kings who knelt before him. He had reached the far shore of all the arts that embellish life. This king had three sons. Their names were Rich-Power, Fierce-Power and Endless-Power and they were supreme blockheads.

Now when the king perceived that they were hostile to education, he summoned his counsellors and said, "Gentlemen, it is known to you that these sons of mine, being hostile to education, are lacking in discernment. So when I behold them, my kingdom brings me no happiness, though all external thorns are drawn. For there is wisdom in the proverb:

*Of sons unborn, or dead, or fools,
Unborn or dead will do:
They cause a little grief, no doubt;
But fools, a long life through.*
and again:

*To what good purpose can a cow
That brings no calf nor
milk be bent?
Or why beget a son who proves
A dunce and disobedient?*

Some means must therefore be devised to awaken their intelligence."

And they, one after another, replied, "O King, first one learns grammar, in twelve years. If this subject has somehow been mastered, then one masters the books on religion and practical life. then the intelligence awakens."

But one of their number, a counsellor named Keen said; "O King, the duration of life is limited, and the verbal sciences require much time for mastery. Therefore let some king of epitome be devised to wake their intelligence. There is a proverb that says:

*Since verbal sciences
have no final end,
Since life is short, and
obstacles impend,*

*Let central facts be picked and
firmly fixed
As swans extract the milk
with water mixed.*

"Now, there is a Brahmin here named Vishnusharman, with a reputation for competence in numerous sciences. Entrust the princes to him. He will certainly make them intelligent in a twinkling."

When the king had listened to this, he summoned Vishnusharman and said, "Holy sir, as a favour to me you must make these princes incomparable masters of the art of practical life. In return, I will bestow upon you a hundred land grants."

And Vishnusharman made this answer to the king, "O King, listen. Here is the plain truth. I am not the man to sell good learning for a hundred land grants. But if I do not, in six months' time, make the boys acquainted with the art of intelligent living, I will give up my own name. Let us cut the matter short. Listen to my lion roar. My boasting arises from no greed for cash. Besides, I have no use for money; I am eighty years old, and all the objects of sensual desire have lost their charm. But in order that your request may be granted, I will show a sporting spirit with reference to artistic matters. Make a note of the date. If I fail to render your sons, in six months' time, incomparable masters of the art of intelligent living, then His Majesty is at liberty to show me His Majestic bare bottom."

When the king, surrounded by his counsellors, had listened to the Brahmin's highly unconventional promise, he was dumbstruck. He entrusted the princes to him, and experienced supreme content.

Meanwhile, Vishnusharman took the boys, went home, and made them learn by heart, five books which he composed and called

- (i) *The Loss of Friends*
- (ii) *The Winning of Friends*
- (iii) *Crows and Owls*
- (iv) *Loss of Gains*
- (v) *Ill-considered Action.*

These the princes learned, and in six months' time they answered the prescription. Since that day this work on the art of intelligent living, called the *Panchatantra*, or the Five Books, has travelled the world, aiming at awakening the intelligence in the young.

The Story of the Last Two Episodes

A jungle elephant under the influence of spring fever, distressed by the heat, crushed the eggs of a sparrow and his wife. So, in order to take revenge on him, they recruit the wisdom of a gnat, a woodpecker and a frog. Hearing this, the plover picked up courage and decided to fulfil its revenge against the ocean for the rape of its chicks, by filling it with clods and dust. But it was plain that even the combined help of all the plover's friends would not be able to achieve such an arduous task. So they decided to go to a wise old gander for counsel. This gander and all the other geese lived on a fig tree on which climbed a koshambi creeper. The gander felt all along that the creeper ought to be removed since it boded them all ill. Sure enough, a hunter climbed the creeper and snared them all in a net. The gander being the wisest of all of them advised them to play dead. The hunter would remove the net thinking that they were all dead and they would fly away. Which is what they all did. So wise was he. The birds expressed their grief to him. But the gander said that they must take their case to Garuda, the king of all birds, saying,

*The poor are in peculiar need
Of being secret when they feed :
The lion killed the ram who could
Not check his appetite for food.*

"How was that ?" asked Garuda and an old bird told the story of the

relation to his diet." So he made a quick spring and killed the ram. "And that is why I say:

*The poor are in peculiar need
Of being secret when they feed,*

and the rest of it."

While they were thus conferring. Vishnu's messenger returned and said: "Garuda, Lord Vishnu sends orders that you repair at once to the celestial city." On hearing this, Garuda proudly said to him: "Messenger, what will the master do with so poor a servant as I am?"

"Garuda," said the messenger, "it may be that the blessed one has spoken to you harshly. But why should you display pride toward the blessed one?" And Garuda replied: "The ocean, the resting-place of the blessed one, has stolen the eggs of the plover, who is my servant. If I do not chastise him, then I am not the servant of the blessed one. Make this report to the master."

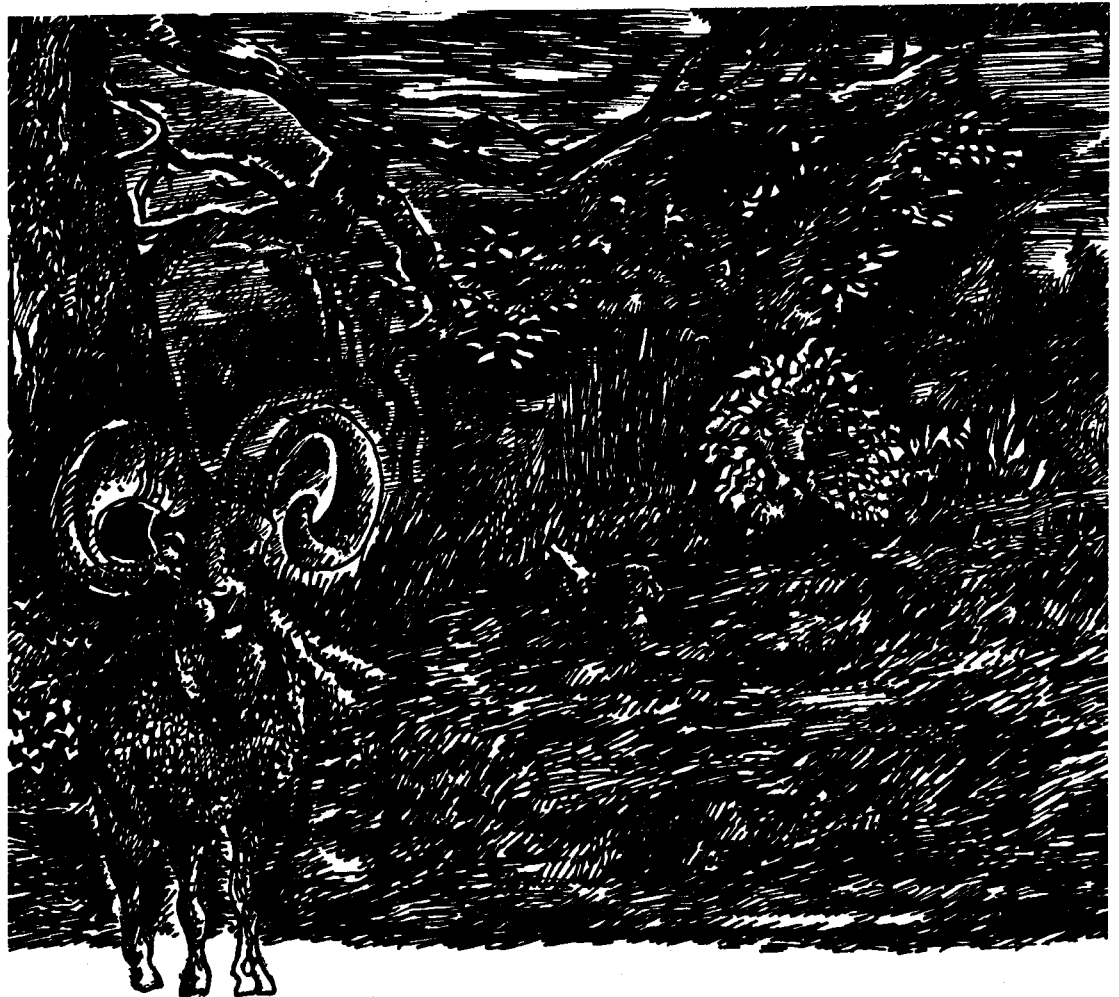
Now when Vishnu learned from the messenger's lips that Garuda was feigning anger, he thought: "Ah, he is dreadfully angry. I will therefore go in person, will address him, and bring him back with all honour. For the proverb says:

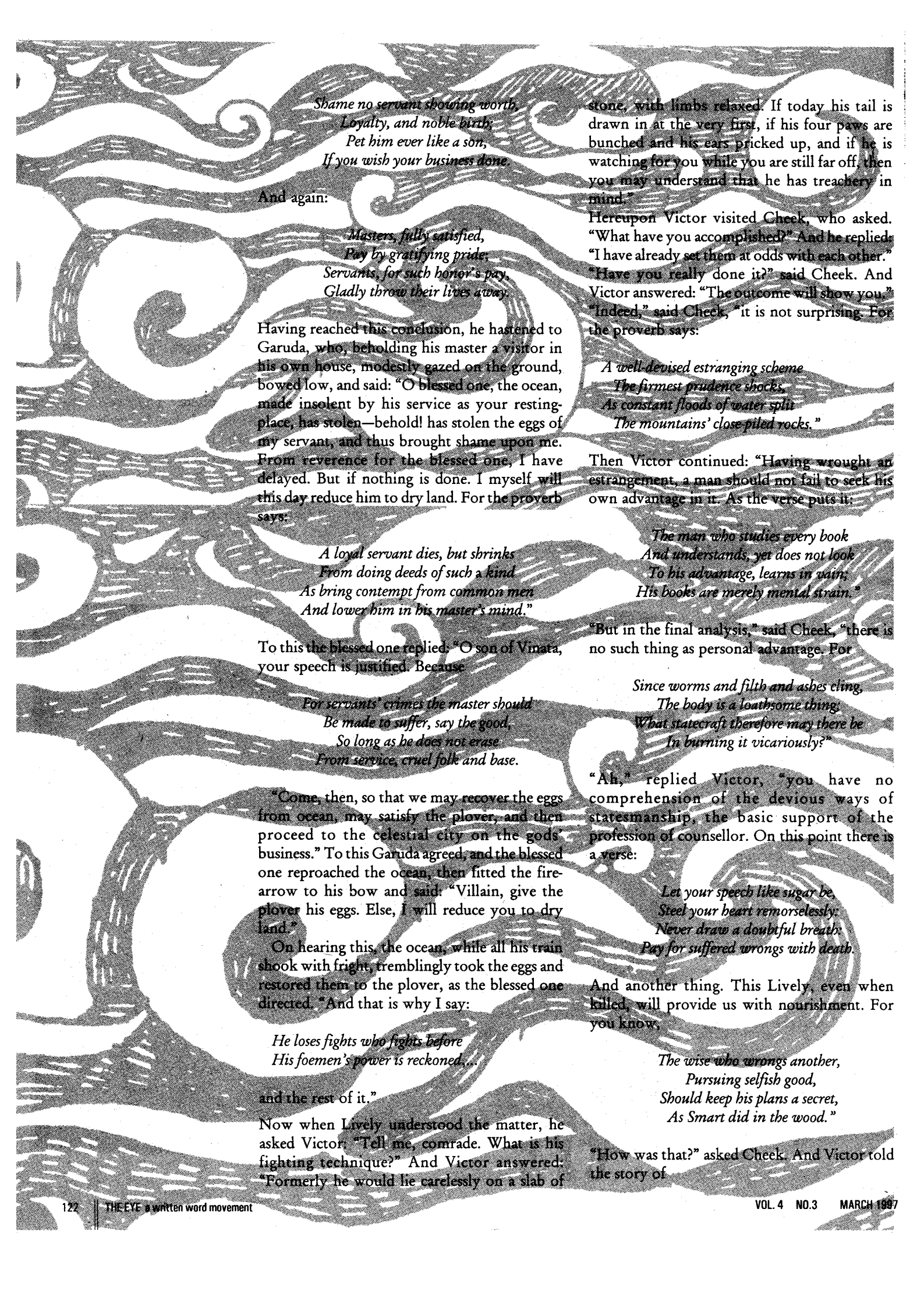
LION AND THE RAM

In a part of a forest was a ram, separated from his flock. In the armour of his great fleece and horns, he named the wood, a tough customer.

Now one day a lion in that forest, who had a retinue of all kinds of animals, encountered him. At this unprecedented sight, since the wool so bristled in every direction as to conceal the body, the lion's heart was troubled and invaded by fear. "Surely, he is more powerful than I am," thought he. "That is why he wanders here so fearlessly." And the lion edged away.

But on a later day the lion saw the same ram cropping grass on the forest floor, and he thought: "What! The fellow nibbles grass! His strength must be in





*Shame no servant showing worth,
Loyalty, and noble birth;
Pet him ever like a son,
If you wish your business done.*

And again:

*Masters, fully satisfied,
Pay by gratifying pride;
Servants, for such honor's pay,
Gladly throw their lives away.*

Having reached this conclusion, he hastened to Garuda, who, beholding his master a visitor in his own house, modestly gazed on the ground, bowed low, and said: "O blessed one, the ocean, made insolent by his service as your resting-place, has stolen—behold! has stolen the eggs of my servant, and thus brought shame upon me. From reverence for the blessed one, I have delayed. But if nothing is done, I myself will this day reduce him to dry land. For the proverb says:

*A loyal servant dies, but shrinks
From doing deeds of such a kind
As bring contempt from common men
And lower him in his master's mind."*

To this the blessed one replied: "O son of Vinata, your speech is justified. Because

*For servants' crimes the master should
Be made to suffer, say the good,
So long as he does not erase
From service, cruel folk and base.*

"Come, then, so that we may recover the eggs from ocean, may satisfy the plover, and then proceed to the celestial city on the gods' business." To this Garuda agreed, and the blessed one reproached the ocean, then fitted the fire-arrow to his bow and said: "Villain, give the plover his eggs. Else, I will reduce you to dry land."

On hearing this, the ocean, while all his train shook with fright, tremblingly took the eggs and restored them to the plover, as the blessed one directed. "And that is why I say:

*He loses fights who fights before
His foemen's power is reckoned,*

and the rest of it."

Now when Lively understood the matter, he asked Victor: "Tell me, comrade. What is his fighting technique?" And Victor answered: "Formerly he would lie carelessly on a slab of

stone, with limbs relaxed. If today his tail is drawn in at the very first, if his four paws are bunched and his ears pricked up, and if he is watching for you while you are still far off, then you may understand that he has treachery in mind."

Hereupon Victor visited Cheek, who asked: "What have you accomplished?" And he replied: "I have already set them at odds with each other." "Have you really done it?" said Cheek. And Victor answered: "The outcome will show you." "Indeed," said Cheek, "it is not surprising. For the proverb says:

*A well-devised estranging scheme
The firmest prudence shocks,
As constant floods of water split
The mountains' close-piled rocks."*

Then Victor continued: "Having wrought an estrangement, a man should not fail to seek his own advantage in it. As the verse puts it:

*The man who studies every book
And understands, yet does not look
To his advantage, learns in vain;
His books are merely mental strain."*

"But in the final analysis," said Cheek, "there is no such thing as personal advantage. For

*Since worms and filth and ashes cling,
The body is a loathsome thing;
What statecraft therefore may there be
In burning it vicariously?"*

"Ah," replied Victor, "you have no comprehension of the devious ways of statesmanship, the basic support of the profession of counsellor. On this point there is a verse:

*Let your speech like sugar be,
Steel your heart remorselessly;
Never draw a doubtful breath:
Pay for suffered wrongs with death."*

And another thing. This Lively, even when killed, will provide us with nourishment. For you know,

*The wise who wrongs another,
Pursuing selfish good,
Should keep his plans a secret,
As Smart did in the wood."*

"How was that?" asked Cheek. And Victor told the story of

SMART, THE JACKAL

In a part of a forest lived a lion named Thunder-Fang, in company with three counsellors, a wolf, a jackal and a camel, whose names were Meat-Face, Smart, and Spike-Ear. One day he fought with a furious elephant whose sharp-pointed tusk so tore his body that he withdrew from the world.

Then, suffering from a seven-day fast, his body lean with hunger, he said to his famished advisers: "Round up some creature in the forest, so that, even in my present condition. I may provide needed nourishment for you." The moment he issued his orders, they roamed the wood, but found nothing.

Thereupon Smart reflected: "If Spike-Ear here were killed, then we should all be nourished for a few days. However, the master is kept from killing him by friendly feeling. In spite of that, my wit will put the master in a frame of mind to kill him. For, indeed,

*All understanding may be won,
All things be slain, and all be done,
If mortals have sufficient wit;
For me, I make good use of it."*



After these reflections, he said to Spike-Ear: "Friend Spike-Ear, the master lacks wholesome food, and is starving. If the master goes, our death is also a certain thing. So I have a suggestion for your benefit and the master's. Please pay attention." "My good fellow," said Spike-Ear. "make haste to inform me, so that I may unhesitatingly do as you say. Besides, one earns credit for a hundred good deeds by serving his master."

And Smart said: "My good fellow, give your own body at 100 per cent interest, so that you may receive a double body, and the master may prolong his life." On hearing this proposal, Spike-Ear said: "If that is possible, my friend, my body shall be so devoted. Tell the master that this thing should be done. I stipulate only that the Death-God be requested to guarantee the bargain."

Having made their decision, they all went to visit the lion, and Smart said: "O King we did not find a thing today, and the blessed sun is already near his setting." On hearing this, the lion fell into deep despondency. Then Smart continued: "O King, our friend Spike-Ear makes this proposal: 'If you call upon the Death-God to guarantee the bargain, and if you render it back with 100 per cent of interest, then I will give my body'." "My good fellow," answered the lion, "yours is a beautiful act. Let it be as you say." On the basis of this pact, Spike-Ear was struck down by the lion's paw, his body was torn by the wolf and the jackal, and he died.

Then Smart reflected: "How can I get him all to myself to eat?" With this thought in his mind, he noticed that the lion's body was smeared with

blood, and he said: "Master, you must go to the river to bathe and worship the gods, while I stay here with Meat-Face to guard the food-supply." On hearing this, the lion went to the river.

When the lion was gone, Smart said to Meat-Face: "Friend Meat-Face, you are starving. You might eat some of this camel before the old master returns. I will make your apologies to the master." So Meat-Face took the hint, but had only taken a taste when Smart cried: "Drop it, Meat-Face. The master is coming."

Presently the lion returned, saw that the camel was minus a heart, and wrathfully roared: "Look here! Who turned this camel into leavings? I wish to kill him, too." Then Meat-Face peered into Smart's visage, as much as to say: "Come, now! Say something, so that he may calm down." But Smart laughed and said: "Come, come! You ate the camel's heart all by yourself. Why do you look at me?" And Meat-Face, hearing this, fled for his life, making for another country. But when the lion had pursued him a short distance, he turned back, thinking: "He, too, is unguipugnacious. I must not kill him."

At this moment, as fate would have it, there came that way a great camel caravan, heavily laden, making a tremendous jingling with the bells tied to the camels' necks. And when the lion heard the jingle of the bells, loud even in the distance, he said to the jackal: "My good fellow, find out what this horrible noise may be."

On receiving this commission, Smart advanced a little in the forest, then darted back, and cried in great excitement: "Run, master! Run, if you can run!"

"My good fellow," said the lion "why terrify me so? Tell me what it is." And Smart cried: "Master, the Death-God is coming, and he is in a rage against you because you brought untimely death upon his camel, and had him guarantee the bargain. He intends to make you pay a

thousand fold for his camel. He has immense pride in his camels. He also plans to make inquiries about the father and grandfathers of that one. He is coming. He is near at hand."

When the lion heard this, he, too, abandoned the dead camel and scampered for dear life. Whereupon Smart ate the camel bit by bit, so that the meat lasted a long time. And that is why I say:

*The wise who wrongs another,
Pursuing selfish good,...*

and the rest of it."

Now when Victor was gone, Lively reflected: "What am I to do? Suppose I go elsewhere, then some other merciless creature will kill me, for this is a wild wood. Indeed, when the master is furious, it is not possible even to depart. For the proverb says:

*Impunity comes not
By fleeing far away:
The long arms of the shrewd
Make careless sinners pay.*

"My best course is to approach the lion. He might regard me as a suppliant, might even spare my life."

Having thus set his mind in order, he started very slowly, with troubled spirit, and when he perceived the lion in the posture foretold by Victor, he sank down at some little distance, thinking: "Ah, the unfathomable character of kings! As the proverb says:

*'tis a house with serpents crawling,
Wood with beasts of prey appalling,
Lotus-pond where blossoms smile
O'er the lurking crocodile,
Spot that sneaking rogues deface
With repeated slanders base—
Timid servant never learns
Whither kingly purpose turns."*

Rusty for his part, perceiving the bull in the attitude predicted by Victor, made a sudden spring at him. And Lively, though his body was torn by sharp claws as formidable as thunderbolts, also scored the lion's belly with his horns, contrived to break away from him, and stood in fighting posture, ready to gore again.

At this point Cheek perceived that both of them, red as *dhak* trees in blossom, were intent on killing each other, and he said reproachfully to Victor: "You dunderhead! In setting these two at enmity, you have done a wicked deed. You have brought trouble and confusion into this entire forest, thus proving your ignorance of the true nature of statecraft. For the saying runs:

*Those are counsellors indeed,
Wise in statecraft, who succeed
In composing reckless strife*





*That, unhindered, threatens life:
Those on petty purpose bent,
Keen to visit punishment,
Quick in wrong and folly, bring
Risk to kingdom and to king.*

Ah, poor fool!

*Men of true discernment first
Try conciliation;
For the victories of peace
Suffer no frustration.*

As, poor simpleton! You seek the post of counsellor, and are ignorant of the very name of conciliation. Your ambition is vain, since you love harsh measures. As the proverb puts it:

*Lord Brahma bids the statesman try
Conciliation first,
Postpone or shun (it can be done)
Harsh deeds, of all deeds worst.
'Tis neither sun nor flashing gem
Nor fiery spark,
'Tis peace, form bitter foeman's hearts
That routs the dark.*

And again:

*Try peaceful means, not harsh, to make
Your quarrel flit:
Take sugar, not cucumber, for
A bilious fit.*

And once again:

*The doors that wit unlocks are three—
Peace, shrewd intrigue and bribery:
The fourth device that brings success
In struggle, is plain manliness.*

*'Tis womanish, no doubt, to show
Small strength, abundant sense;
But power is merely bestial, if
Without intelligence.*

*Snake, lion, elephant, and fire,
With water, wind, and sun,
Have power. From undirected power
Is little profit won.*

"Now if it was overweening pride in being the son of a counsellor that has led you to outrage decency, the result will be merely your own ruin. As the proverb says:

*What is learning whose attaining
Sees no passion wane, no reigning
Love and self-control?
Does not make the mind a menial,
Finds in virtue no congenial
Path and final goal?
Whose attaining is but straining
For a name, and never gaining
Fame or peace of soul?*

"Now in the treatises on the subject statesmanship is subsumed under five heads, to wit: proper inception; resources, human and material; determination of place and time; countermeasures for mischance; and successful accomplishment. At the present moment, the master finds himself in serious peril. So, if you have any such capacity, devise countermeasures for his mischance. For the wisdom of a counsellor finds its test in the patching of friendship. Ah, you fool! That you cannot do, because you have a perverted mind. As the saying goes:

*No scamp can further others' work,
But can deprave it:
The mole uproots the mulberry,
But cannot save it.*

"After all, the fault is not yours, but rather the master's, who trusts your words, dull-witted as you are. And the proverb says:

*Educating sluggish wit
Kills no pride but fosters it:
In the sunlight others find
Aid to vision; owls go blind.*

*Education thrusts aside
Man's fatuity and pride:
If it foster them, who can
Cure the educated man?
Remedies are useless when
Heaven's nectar poisons men."*

And Cheek, beholding his master in pitiful plight, sank into deep dejection. "Dreadful," he cried, "dreadful is the penalty the master pays for taking evil counsel! Indeed, there is wisdom in the verse:

*Monarchs who adopt a plan
From the mean and vicious man,
Who refuse to tread the way
That the prudent counsel—they
Enter misadventure's cage
Where the adversaries rage;
Thence deliverance's gate
Crowns an issue rugged, strait*

"Fool! Fool! All the world seeks the service of a master whose retinue is righteous. How, then, can such an evil counsellor as you, who, like a beast, understand nothing but destruction—how can such a one enrich the master with righteous companions? For the proverb says:

*Monarchs, ill-advised, repel
Even though they purpose well:
Sweet and placid waters smile,
But beware the crocodile.*

"Yet you, I suppose, seeking your own advantage, desire to have the king quite solitary. Ah, fool! Are you ignorant of the verse?

THE EYE a written word movement

*Kings shine as social beings, not
As solitaires;
Whoever wish them lonely are
Their adversaries.*

And again:

*Draw benefit from comments harsh:
No poison, this:
In flattery see treason, not
True nectar's bliss.*

"And if you are grieved at seeing others happy and prosperous, that, too, is wicked. It is wrong to proceed thus friends have fulfilled their nature. For

*Those who seek, through treason, friends;
Seek, through humbug, righteous ends:
Property by wronging neighbors;
Learning's wealth by easy labours;
Woman's love by cruel pride—
These are fools, self-stultified.*

Likewise:

*The happiness of subjects makes
The monarch gay and brave:
Nay, what would be the dancing sea
With no gem-flashing wave?*

"Furthermore, for one who has enjoyed the master's favour, modesty is peculiarly proper. As the verse puts it:

*According to his favoured state,
A servant's modest, humble gait
Is notably appropriate.*

"Your character, however, is marked by levity. And the proverb says:

*The great are firm, though battered, as before;
Great ocean is not fouled by caving shore:*

*For petty cause the fickle change and pass;
The gentlest breezes ruffle pliant grass.*

"When all is said, it is the master fault. For in pursuit of virtue, money, and love, he recklessly takes counsel with one like you—one who lives by the mere pretense of administrative competence, in total ignorance of the six expedients and the four devices for attaining success. Yes, there is wisdom in this:

*If kings are satisfied
With servants at their side
Who play a wheedling tongue,
Whose bows are never strung,
Then kingly glory goes,
Embracing manlier foes.*

"Indeed there is much sense in the story which is summed up in the familiar verse:

*The counsellor whose name was Strong
Attained his dearest heart's desire:
He won the favour of his king;
He burned the naked monk with fire."*

"How was that?" asked Victor. And Cheek told the story of

THE MONK WHO LEFT HIS BODY BEHIND
(To be continued...)

In 1924, Arthur W. Ryder, the well known American oriental scholar translated the Panchatantra from Sanskrit to English. It is one of the best of existing translations in any foreign language. The text translated here dates back from the year 1199 AD. We are happy to serialise and present the Panchatantra, interspersing verse and prose as translated by Ryder and published by Jaico.

Illustrations: Meghana Bisneer

The Team at THE EYE

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SCULPTURE OF THE ISSUE

Mithuna 4

The portrayal of *mithunas* had begun to get more and more sophisticated. In Badami art, *mithunas*, *salabhanjikas* and *yakshis* interchanged positions on the *ayaka* (platform or pillar attached to a *stupa* in Andhra art). The extra sensuous tendencies reflected in sculptures of aristocratic couples at Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal were a result of the acceptance of *sringara* by society. This also established a playful relationship between sculpture and literature.

The mango tree is loved all over the Indian subcontinent. Mango blossoms signify the advent of *vasanta*, spring, which was celebrated with great fanfare. *Vasanta* has been poetically described by several classical writers. Kama's arrow of mango flowers was most dreaded since it bred delusion, doubt and dismay in the heart of lovers who reach a certain state of sweet love-sickness that takes away all peace of mind. So the representation of the mango tree is significant. Jayadeva describes the appeal of two lovers to Kama in the *Gitagovinda* thus:

Don't lift your mango blossom arrow!
Don't aim your bow.
Our game proves your triumph, Love.
Striking weak victims is empty valour.
Gitagovinda III, 12

Mithunas evoke not just the erotic *rasa*, but sentiment in its infinitely variegated forms. Nothing evokes it so poignantly as in sculpture.

Prabhakar Begde
Illustration: Indrani Sen.

Mithuna on a bracket,
Eastern Chalukya, 6th Century AD
Cave III, Badami

ENVIRONMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND THE GENDER GAP

Sandhya Venkateswaran,
Sage Publications, Rs 250/-

Dipankar Das

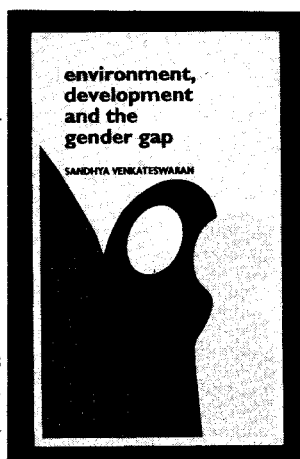
Development is an omnibus term. While post-structuralists may discern a liberal grand narrative of progress in the discourse of development; in the Third World, however, it is the practise of development on which hinges the nation's quality of life. *Environment, Development and the Gender Gap*, qualifies this blanket phenomenon of development by restricting the focus on environment and the gender gap therein.

The book is monographic in its provision for detail and its focus is as wide as a text book's, as necessarily such a book dealing with such a topic has to be. Sandhya Venkateswaran talks about a rapidly degrading environment and its fallout on the poor as seen through the prism of gender. The import of gender on development cannot be over-emphasised. If the poor are being made to pay the price of development, women pay double the price because the impact of environmental destruction and policies of environmental management do not stop at increased workloads and reduced status for women, but goes further to affect women's health and access to education; which in turn sets off a vicious circle of long-term denial.

Often, environmental degradation has impacted upon gender in the most unexpected of ways. For example, a study conducted in Himachal Pradesh showed that as a result of the reduced availability of biomass, girls were the first to be pulled out of school to scrounge for the same, whereas in Kerala, girls were able to attend school due to the relatively easy availability of biomass.

The Eight Plan had begun with the laudable objective of involving more of community participation rather than carry on with top heavy development process, which has been the practice hitherto. But in a situation where laws are gender biased and land titles are made in the name of males even in matriarchal communities, where extension services rarely reach out to women and when centuries old taboos against women touching the plow operate, it is easier said than done.

It is here that Venkateswaran does a fine job to show where women stand in the process of environment related developmental issues. She touches a wide spectrum of issues such as the gender division of labour in agriculture, the impact on women of the gradual erosion of community land and common pastures, the enormous hardships caused by deforestation and in retailing minor forest products such as basket weaving, lac cultivation, rearing *tassar* or even generating domestic energy using a wide array of previous studies, often compiled in neat tabular form. Yet, this welter of data and perspectives do not make it an arid tome, interspersed as it is with interesting nuggets such as the historical fact that about 200 years ago Amritdevi, a Bishnoi woman was the first to hug a tree to preempt its felling,



but the Raja of Jodhpur's men did not spare her nor another 375 Bishnois who had dared to do likewise.

Venkateswaran pertinently points out how governmental efforts in this direction have also been woefully inadequate. Often, as in the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the focus is on the achievement of physical targets and not a gender sensitive mode of achieving it. Governmental measures such as setting up of Village Forest Communities have emphasised the existing iniquities rather than address them.

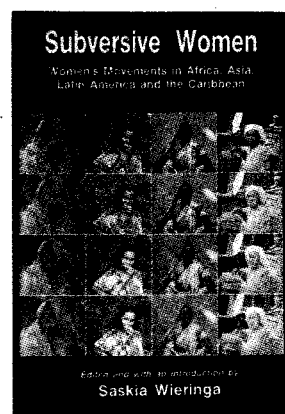
Notwithstanding the inadequacy of databases on this theme (since rarely do programmes have an assessment of gender impact), Venkateswaran's is a precise and clear articulation of an urgent problem. Some direct interviews and case studies may have succeeded in conveying a first-hand feel of the prevalent state of mind. This book, however, is an eye-opener for policy makers, specialists and interested laymen alike.

Dipankar Das is a Research Scholar with the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

SUBVERSIVE WOMEN: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA, ASIA, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Saskia Wieringa, Ed. and Intro.
Kali For Women; London and
New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995
Price Rs. 300/-

Kavita Sharma



A thought provoking, well-researched book, *Subversive Women* spans both a wide range of geographical space and issues. It has brought together researchers from several countries - Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Sudan, Somalia, India and Indonesia. A fine introduction by Saskia Wieringa outlines the important issues involved. The 'Subversive' in the title resonates. As Wieringa points out, women's acts of resistance, of self-affirmation in various social and political context are in themselves subversive. Women too, behave subversively as they circumvent, uncode, and deny social mores, replacing them by their own. Further, women's movements constantly get subverted as they get defeated by or assimilated into what are perceived as larger and more important issues. 'Feminism', too has become controversial. This is because it cannot be seen as a monolithic movement. Perceptions of the needs of women are bound to be multilayered and even contradictory depending on the political, economic and social milieu in which these women are operating. The working

definition agreed upon by the researchers of this book was a fairly uncomplicated one; 'an awareness of women's oppression on domestic, social, economic and political levels, accompanied by a willingness to struggle against such oppression.'

Wieringa also analyses the wedge that was driven between the feminists of the Third World and Western feminists of the developed world towards the end of the nineteenth century. There is the notion that the first wave of Western feminism was primarily concerned with equal rights and the vote. Third World feminism on the other hand, was mainly devoted to anti-colonial struggles. This was followed by the Third World primary concern with issues of food and labour while western feminism concentrates on body politics. However, as Wieringa points out, the movement for the right to vote had much wider ramifications. It was linked to issues like the abolition of slavery; improvement of the working condition for women; and the use of education and political rights as a tool for fuller social life for women in society. The repercussions of the divisions can be felt till today. Socialist women are reluctant to enter feminist consciousness raising groups while others feel guilty setting up type crises centres rather than libraries for women as if the two were mutually exclusive. This is not to suggest that women's movement in the west and in the Third World are alike but that there are several parallel concerns.

Certain common themes emerge through the particularities of issues in different countries. Women are denied their rights inspite of their participation in the colonial struggles. They get naturally actively involved in the worker's movement's but somewhere along the way issues pertaining to them get subsumed in what are considered larger concerns. There is an interesting history of the use literary activity and folk genres to voice issues. And, women's issues often get appropriated by men. There is a growing realisation that colonisation has tended to worsen women's position and to subjugate them even further beyond their indigenous subservience. This idea is evident in essays in *Recasting Women* edited by K. Sangari and S. Vaid and Minalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity*. It suited the coloniser's to project their Third World subjects as childlike, emotional unreasonable and instinctive. It was the white man's burden to bring in culture to these benighted people and to improve the degraded status of their women. Consequently measures were propagated which improved the condition of women in certain spheres but simultaneously eroded their political, economic and social rights. Victorian ideals of motherhood and domesticity pushed women even further into the four walls of the house in sexually subservient positions. This is true even of matriarchal societies (Saskia Wieringa, *Matrilinearity and Women's Interests: The Minangkabau of Western Sumatra*).

Maritza Villavicencio in her essay *Women's movement in Peru: The Early Years*, shows how the *veladas literarias* or literary evenings epitomised the advances achieved by a whole generation of women intellectuals. These women who had educated themselves and produced written word with great effort despite family and social opposition, contested the Catholic and colonial ideology that regarded women's intellectual capacities as inferior. The *veladas* allowed women to address the public directly. Similarly, Honour Ford-Smith discusses the use of the popular theatre of Jamaica, Jonkonnu, to voice women's issues. And in Somalia, women have expressed their grievances in poetry. '*Somalia: Poetry as Resistance against Colonialism and Patriarchy*'

have developed their own poetic expressions. Through their work songs, they not only break their monotony and drudgery but also convey messages to express their daily problems, desires and aspirations, grievances and protests against forms of subjugation.

Several articles deal with women's participation in social movements. The anti-price rise movement in 1972 begun in Bombay being a case in point. The unionising of the tobacco workers of Nipani, a place on the border of Karnataka and Maharashtra offers fascinating insights into the complexity of women's quest for independence and its simultaneous retardation because of internecine competition among them accentuated by strife between different castes and religious communities that prevents unity.

Women and Colonial Policy in Jamaica after the 1938 Uprising makes an interesting point about how a seemingly benevolent reform can work to the detriment of women. It analyses the transition from slavery to emancipation during which the European ideology of the male breadwinner and propert owner and the dependent, non-earning housewife gradually became entrenched in the social system. While the West African culture to which the slaves belonged, not only supported women's access to land, but also allowed family lands and goods to be passed from one generation to another through female members who had the main responsibility for growing and preparing the family's food. This allowed more equitable relations to develop both sexes. British ideology thrived in the post-emancipation period, a gradual weakening of women's control over their land took place. This got aggravated in various ways. Married slaves, for example, were given preference in estate housing. The land settlement schemes established the concept of 'farm family' with a male head by using such a family unit as the basis for allocating land. The consequence was that while women constituted two-thirds of the field labour force, their position with regard to men changed. Men came to be seen as the 'real' labour force and women only 'supplementary.' It became more widely accepted that a woman's place was in the home. the missionaries saw this as a way of removing women from the brutality hardships of field labour. The past experience of ex-slaves lent credence to the argument but in practical terms it deprived women of direct control over their main asset, land, placing them in a subordinate position to men.

The essays on *Sudanese Women's Movement* reveal how participation in the struggle for democracy does not ensure an equitable position in society. Gender issues because they were considered of secondary importance at that time were never raised

Subversive Women is a stimulating analysis of the challenges faced by women's movements. Well written, eminently readable in spite of the complex issues dealt with, it is a must for women in search of answers both as leaders and participants in movements pertaining to women's issues.

Kavita Sharma is a reviewer, translator, critic and educationist. She teaches at the Hindu College, Delhi University.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE ORGANIC FARMING SOURCE BOOK

Edited by Claude Alvares

The Other India Press and Third World Network

Price: Rs.250/-

Kishore Sant

If you were to ask me what India's most precious possessions have been or are, I would not point to the gold in the vaults of the Nizam of Hyderabad nor to the bank balances of the millionaires... nor to the palaces of princes and mansions of the rich, but to the sun and the land and the rivers and the rains and the mountains of our great country and, above all, to those crores

upon crores of men, women and children who live on it'.

I begin this review with the above quotation from Minoo Masani's *Our India* (published in 1940 and sold for one rupee!) to recall the priorities we cherished in the years leading up to our independence. We have come a long way from giving the highest value to our land, our rivers, our mountains and our people. On the contrary, we have heaped devastation on our forests, polluted our rivers, poisoned our soils, desecrated our hills and mountains and impoverished and debilitated

the majority of our people. The latest phase in this onward march of new civilisation (or globalisation as it is known today) is marked by the so-called economic reforms. For the bulk of the established elite these are the necessary and inevitable means by which the enterprise and energies of our people can be unleashed so that they can take their rightful place alongside the Asian tigers and giants. For others they are the harbingers of doom and destruction for all this ancient land and civilisation stand for in their own right.

The publishers of *The Organic Farming Source Book* belong to the latter category. As they say 'their intention is nothing short of michievous.' They would 'dethrone synthetic chemicals and pesticides.... demolish Macaulay's system of education ...restore the country to its tradition.... return destiny to the hands of ordinary folks ... eliminate multinationals... turn the world upside down'. This publication is the first in their series of alternative source books and manuals on health, education, consumer affairs, democratic practice and agriculture, towards the carrying out of these intentions.

This book is much more than a source book, i.e., it is a source book in a deeper sense. It is essentially about the sources, the 'srots' or springs of our creativity in making our land, our soils, our waters, our seeds, our flora and our fauna more productive. It is also about sharing and giving to others and to Mother Nature who provisioned us in the first place. Its key concern, organic farming, is not conceived in the narrow

technical sense. It is seen more as a generic concept, as an approach and as an attitude to agriculture. As such it includes alternative agriculture, no till or natural farming, permaculture, biodynamic and indigenous agriculture, and low external input sustainable agriculture (*leisa*). Beyond these the *Source Book* initiates us into large epochal themes and issues around growing and distribution of food over the ages.

In the evocative phrases of S. Kappen, 'Our ancestors saw cultivation as a cult – an act of worship. They sowed and reaped in the spirit of reverence. Labour did not render the earth sterile. Nor did it bring ruin upon her. Rather, it helped earth to become fecund and bear fruit. In this process humans became even more human. To relate thus to nature meant adhering to *rta*, the cycle of seasons, the rising and setting of the sun, the birth, growth and decay of plants and living beings. In and through human beings, the cosmic *rta* became ethical behaviour. All labour not in harmony with *rta* was an act of sheer violence done to mother earth.' (*Tradition Modernity Counter-Culture*)

In the opening essay *Annam Babu Kurvita*, based on their book with the same title, Jitendra Bajaj and M.N. Srinivas remind us about the sacred obligations of growing and giving food in ancient India. It is contained, among various sources, in Bhishma's teachings conveyed to Yudhishtra by Krishna in the *Mahabharata* culminating in the injunction

dadasvanam dadasvanam dadasvanam Yudhishtra! (O Yudhishtra! Give food! Give food! and keep giving!) This giving to others is to precade, even supercede, eating. In fact, eating alone one becomes a partaker of sin. This culture and conduct of growing and giving food generously continues to be lived by some even today in the remote rural and forest areas. As a preferred and predominant mode it was destroyed during the British times when plunder for greed came to reign pupreme. The articles by Dharampal and extracts of the writings of Dr. M.S. Randhawa provide us the historical evidence of the high and abiding productivity of Indian agriculture in the pre-colonial period. Winin Pereira's work with the Warlis in Maharastra documents the living traditions that sustain their livelihood based on land and forests. Claude Alvares reviews the studies of several authors, notably Nirmal Sengupta and Anupam Mishra, on traditional water harvesting and management systems in different parts of the country. A penetrating interview with the late Dr. R.H. Richharia brings out the larger than life stature of this great scientist who was humble and open in learning from the Chhatisgarh tribal practitioners of hybrid rice techniques.

These insights from the *Smritis*, *Shrutis* and historical sources are followed by a hard look at the seamier side of the 'Green Revolution'. The late Sir Albert Howard, an eminent soil scientist of his time, tells us about the flawed scientific reasoning of Justus von Liebig's NPK Theory in 1840 that led to large scale use of chemical fertilizers in European agriculture. In his classic *The Agricultural Testament* Sir Howard lauds the sophisticated soil fertility enhancing and health promoting practices in Indian agriculture. He repeatedly advocates a better understanding of these by scientists as an essential basis for future progress in agricultural research and productivity. All this was ignored by the post-independence increasingly U.S. influenced administrative and scientific establishment in agriculture. As is well-known now, the country was forced to go for the 'Green Revolution' package involving massive import of chemical fertilizers, High Input Varieties (H I V) of maize and wheat and



U.S. aid. A series of scathing critiques by Jitendra Bajaj, Sailen Ghosh, Winin Pereira, Korah Mathen, Vandana Shiva and Jose Lutzenberger uncover the machinations of the chemical industry and its agents in foisting the 'Green Revolution' at policy/academic level, and the resultant poisoning of soils and waters, genetic erosion and concentration of control in the hands of agrobusiness. Belatedly, there is recognition of the enormous misadventure we have been launched on, and of the unsustainability of this course. Now, some of the 'Green Revolutionaries' are turning to organic farming modes.

Principles of Organic Farming, the subject of Chapter Four, is perhaps that most substantive and valuable part of the *Source Book*. It contains scholarly and well-researched contributions from Sailen Ghosh, Albert Howard, Claude Bourguignon, Masanobu Fukuoka and Bhasker Save. These explain the essentials of the different variants of organic farming evolved through living practice, experiments and careful study. All of them draw upon the ways of nature and the wisdom of farmers throughout the world and in different ages, to give us the following general principles of organic farming:

1. Nature is the best role model and the best techniques are those which are based on an intimate understanding of nature's ways.
2. Soil is to be considered as a living system. Soil's living population of microbes and other organisms contributes significantly to its fertility on a sustainable basis.
3. Soil's total environment from its structure to its cover has to be considered for healthy agriculture.

The major portion of the *Source Book* is devoted to the work of organic farmers and promoters of organic farming in India. It is a 'directory' format with state-wise surveys of the state-of-the-art in farming, case studies, brief descriptions, interviews and bare register listings. Addresses of suppliers of inputs and outlet for produce related to organic farming are also provided. The only serious omission in this otherwise comprehensive and attractive compilation is that it does not have an index. Hopefully, this can be rectified in a future edition.

In commending the *Source Book*, let me conclude with a quotation from Ken Hunt's introduction to *Legacy*, the recently released album of 16th to 18th century Indian classical music played on the sarod by Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and sung by Asha Bhonsle.

'The clamorous tongues of modern times grow bigger and better. Our "Information Age" thrives on the louder and faster. The honeyed buzz of the newest as the best fills our ears and swamps the senses. Fortunately, however, some things reveal the fictions of promotion and the eyesore of space-filler panegyrics for the puff pieces they are. Everything cannot be classical, sensational or extraordinary - whatever the style *pundits* say. But sometimes, in William Tyndale's perfect phrase, the scales really do fall from our eyes. We can see that we are in the presence of something special.'

Like *Legacy* in music, the evocation of the traditional/abiding in agriculture in the pages of the *Source Book* is also 'something special'. It deserves study and engagement by all who are concerned about the present and future of our land, our sun, our mountains, our rivers, our forests and, above all, crores and crores of our people.

BAD DREAMS GOOD DREAMS

A Vajrayanti Writes While Learning English
Anadish Pal

Yisheng Information, 1996, Delhi

Kasturi Kanthan

This book of poems begins by confessing in an apologetic tone that 'The Muse took hold of me,' and that he had this irresistible urge to write. He admits quite candidly, 'I want to write about so many things

And I don't have a central idea.' (*Wait Till I am Dead*, p. 55).

Obviously, the poet decides to tell all - honesty is his watchword as he continues,

'I write a poem once in a while
And still I want to become a poet
Knowing well that it is impossible

To earn one's bread this way.' (*Lonely Man*, p. 152).

Anadish Pal treats his art of writing and his reader with great deference and respect. He worries about the effect of poetry on the reader. Acknowledging the 'sacred reader' as his God (*The Poor Girl's Face*, p. 67) he feels that poetry should impact the reader in some way or the other, not just leave the 'men ah-ing and women ooh-ing,' (*Harangue and the Beautiful*, p. 95) He is constantly agitated about the role of the poet which is obvious when he questions, 'Do we contribute anything \... \... \ Do we really add nothing?' (*Reading and Writing*, p. 40). He is anxious,

'Is my reality reality at all?...

Is my imagery imagery at all?

Is my reality a part of the reality

Of which I am a reality?' (*Making You Unhappy*, p. 86).

He wonders whether 'Reading from the written word,' makes the reader 'Remain ignorant of your footprints/ On your own heartbeat.' (*Reading and Writing*, p. 40).

The poet's mind is stocked like a 'departmental store' with 'so many many things' (*In Lockup*, p. 50-51). He writes like the 84-year old man who 'wrote as if by habit/ Words would travel to the tips/ Of his fingers and stop' (*The Programme*, p. 68) regardless of the fact that 'no buyer's going to come' (*In Lockup*, p. 50). The poet has to write perforce, because he has 'no way, no other way,' (*In Lockup*, p. 50) and he has to stream out the crowding thoughts in his mind,

'People and images populated his inside
And somehow found ways to come down,
To write strange lines in normal daylight.'

(*The Programme*, p. 70).

He emphatically tells us that poetry is

'not just cudgelling around
With unending, doomed ideas-
Always searching...' (*Poems*, p. 111).

Anadish Pal assures 'I would write for the five year old

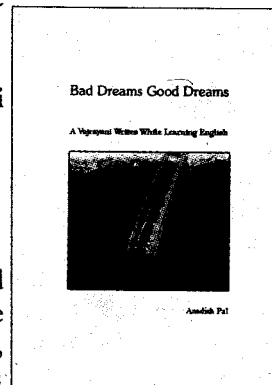
I would sing for the eighteen year old

I would write not wonderment

I would write with no comment'

(*A Song Not In a Song* p. 160-161)

He reiterates that poems should enchant the reader, excite



and satisfy him like 'excellent wine or a fresh rose'
(*Poems*, p. 111).

He believes the poet should discard old hackneyed themes and write 'about everyday life' like children, lovers, mother, women, old men (*Poems*, p. 110) and about the 'scaling epithelium' of a girl's elbows or the young Jat's beard. (*Mock*, p. 125).

Whatever his subject matter, almost all of Anandish Pal's poems are marked by strong feeling and conviction. They are further enriched by a certain sincerity and sensitivity. Many of his poems deal with certain familiar and important issues and ideas which are obvious in their titles like, 'Reason and Truth', 'Beauty and Respectability', 'Time and Existence', 'Ever Transcendental', 'Eternity', 'Desire and Hate', 'Births and Deaths', 'Wait Till I am Dead', 'Finally Settling for Death', 'Ballad of Winter in Hell' and 'A Visit to a Citadel of Torture'. Through these poems he tries to seek a meaning and then realises, that,

'Similes, metaphors and symbols
Are hollow.'

(*Reason and Truth*, p. 12).

There is a slight disillusionment in his awareness, 'So much for the magic of words,' (*Dissatisfied Partners*, p. 132). He says somewhat tiredly that dictionaries have blank pages and 'Words play around' (*The Words Playing*, p. 28). Even as the poet quests after high falutin' notions like Beauty, Truth and Happiness he accepts that 'language is a lie,' (*Meaning*, p. 73). Through different poems he depicts the meaninglessness, a sense of loss, dejection and incomprehension. He moans,

'I just cry
Like a man in a dream
Dreaming an impossibility. (*8th Evening*, p. 20).

Clearly he reiterates, 'I don't find happiness, I seek it,' (*A Story*, p. 130), only to find that

'Happiness is a mood, a view -
A biochemistry, perhaps.' (*Depression*, p. 36).

Even as he delves for truth he exults in the fact that 'Truth is a mad lie' (*Beauty*, p. 91) and that 'Truth is far beyond\ The tiniest star\ Of the world of dreams'. (*The Words Playing*, p. 29). Like T. S. Eliot, this poet also deals with Time, past, present and future when he declares that, 'All the time is here once, always and now,' (*Ever Transcendental*, p. 25) and then he graphically describes, 'Eternity gnaws at you\ Like a slut glances' (*Rhyme in Time*, p. 56).

Anandish Pal does not divide his poems into any categories or sections but there are a few themes and images which keep recurring in his poetry. The first poem in this collection talks about his 'heady childhood days'. (*Playing Marbles*, p. 4). This is echoed in other poems where childhood is blended with charming innocence and a certain down-to-earth practicality, and a sense of ordinariness, when 'gold's just a yellow metal,' and where 'death loses its evil \ Life becomes a dream again,' (*I'm a Child Again*, p. 46). At the same time he demonstrates an uncanny knack of keeping intact the child's sense of wonder in a lovely poem where children are shown treasuring ordinary cowrie shells,

'Just because they were something.
We used to preserve those cowries,
Just because they were quite useless'
(*Cowrie Shells*, p. 107).

He also uses the stone, time and again in his poems. The

stone becomes a metaphor for indifference, and a sombre gravity, 'Turning into stone is the ultimate,' (*The Statement*, p. 138). Their violence is quietly and effectively heightened when the poet tells us that stones,

'were the epitome of stability,
And yet they could do whatever they wanted,
Nothing moved and yet when moved
They crushed you against their heart.'

(*The Story of My Telling of a Poem for a Stone in English*, p. 62).

The stones and rocks stand not just for stability but also for the immutability of an indifferent time. 'The dead rocks...dull and lifeless,' (*The Giant Lizard*, p. 126), were an integral part of a moving, darting world with the poet's camera following it. (*The Path of Stone*, p. 98). The most startling use of this metaphor is in that exciting poem telling the story of Barnaclez. He is to be stoned to death but he refuses to die. On the face of a relentless onslaught, he takes years to succumb, but only after,

'Many a time he would grab a stone in his mouth,
And would spit it so violently
That a few people got hurt and died,
Before he finally gave in.' (*Stoning to Death*, p. 87).

A predominant emotion of the poems in this collection seems to be anger - sometimes stark indignation, and sometimes a muted anger or an implicit vexation. There is a seething sense of hopelessness when he says that we,

'Helpless and stupefied,
Just have to wait patiently
For it to heal.' (*Patience*, p. 123).

There is a whole poem expressing his resentment when he complains about almost everything. He is dissatisfied with his body, with his life, with what he is doing and with his ineffectual endeavour. He says with an almost childish petulance,

'I want to kick it like an empty bucket,
I want to crush it like a paper cup,
I want to stamp it down like a dry leaf. (*Anger*, p. 124).

Vexed and confused he asks in a child-like manner why the day cannot become night 'And night a morning,' He bemoans the fact that,

'You don't know nothing
I don't tell you anything.' (*Dissatisfied Partners*, p. 132).

In another poem he is equally incensed by his achievement which in no way is commensurate with his efforts. He claims he works 'day and night' but he does not find fulfilment in the coins, papers, notes that he gets or the success, popularity, respect and power that he commands. Frustrated he asks, 'I work with all these\ And get what?' (*Futility*, p. 30).

These emotions are best expressed in a simple and touching poem which emphasizes the futility of our endeavours, the sterility in our lives and the incapability of our prowess. He likens us to the little snail which carries all its burdens, possessions and emotions patiently and doggedly, with a softness and flexibility. Ultimately, however the snail is,

'Incapable of accomplishing much
And can never change the world
Perhaps what one can do
Is directly related to
What one can never get.' (*Ye Little Snail*, p. 114)

He roundly rebukes himself while he stands bewildered in a confusing maze, 'I must be a fool \ Trying to find the meaning of words.' (*What to Understand*, p. 114).

visions. 'Only this dreamtime \ Could take me along,' (*Dreaming Darjeeling Tea*, p. 149), he realizes and he looks beyond 'this soft formless hope \ For which there are no words \ Only soft formless shadows,' and these 'moments of dreaming \ Gave me a scheme of life', (*Dreams*, p.34).

Anadish Pal's poetry reads very well. He seems to write effortlessly and has a good, terse and incisive style. There is no ramby-pambiness in him. The poet, however, seems to have a penchant for playing with words, e.g. 'whoa, boa, baobab, wail, wailing, wall,' (*No Edit*, p. 10). He uses words piled on each other with good effect, e.g. 'paisa, pfenig, \Peso, penny,' (*No Edit*, p. 10) or 'Eskimos, Europeans, Falashas and Fijians,' (*Just Sitting*, p. 47), or 'onions, lilies, davenport... \ So set squares, cocoa, pens and pencils are stacked, \... \ So, Macintoshes, microscopes and boxes,' (*In Lockup*, p. 50). This reiteration works very well in this poem,

'I tend the calculator
I mend the ghetto blaster
I live in a housing cluster,
I have my efficiency
I have no deficiency.' (*Odd-Jobman*, p. 58).

Of course, too much of this begins to pall and the repetitiveness is tedious, e.g.

'Stare dumb and sneeze
Freeze and thaw and freeze
All with all and all.' (*Rhyme in Time*, p. 56),

or as in,

'Kill, kill, kill,
Laugh, laugh, laugh
Sniff, sniff, sniff.' (*Hi-Fi*, p. 96-97).

He uses English in a very conversational manner - sometimes trying to literally render the common man's way of speaking. Sometimes the lines, then, jar on an otherwise harmonious whole and become unidiomatic, e.g. 'In the present, on the pitched road

Which leads to what may will be next,' (*Reflections on the Road*, p.13).or,

'For whom to write? \ For what to write?' (*Time and Existence*, p. 74) or,

'For what this life?' (*Confusion*, p. 81).

These examples read very awkwardly and I hope they prove my point.

What is important, of course, are not these minor technical details of versification, vocabulary, and idiom. Importantly enough the poet's expression has a sincerity which shines through his work. Sometimes playful, sometimes irreverent, sometimes trifling - whatever the mood he writes in, we must appreciate the fact that his concerns are genuine, his confusion is natural and normal, and if his cries are anguished then his remarks are sardonic and his guffaws are full-throated. He makes no tall claims, in fact he candidly confesses,

'I promise to take you nowhere
I promise to give you nothing.' (*Limitation*, p.88).

All he does is to write his impressions, his ideas and his dreams. Even as he says,

'Life will always go on around it -
So full and so empty,' (*Mainstay*, p.80),

he also agrees that, 'Life's worth living' (*Harangue and the Beautiful*, p. 95).

He adheres to his own maxim, 'You whisper in the soft

listening ears \ any nonsense with absolute honesty,' (*Man*, p. 6). He gives vent to his confusion about life,

'I don't want to live it
And I don't want to die.' (*Confusion*, p.81).

He avers, 'I shall go on \ With tears of my dream in my eyes,' (*A Story*, p. 131) and wonders, 'Maybe death is the great eye-opener \ Which closes one's eyes forever \ To understanding,' (*One*, p.166).

Anadish Pal describes the Vajrayan as an inhabitant of the village Vajrayogini who is a 'strange admixture of confidence and confusion, curiosity and vanity,' (*Prologue*). This could in many ways describe his poetry but this would then be a very modest estimate. His writing is powerful, his images are haunting and there is blood and sinew in his lines. Adapting from his own lines in the poem 'Somnambulism', I am tempted to say that when the poet leaves us on the shores of comprehension, we feel that definitely there is both hope and promise in his work. We hope his next collection of poetry will fulfil the promise.

Kasturi Kanthan is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi.

REHABILITATION OF THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

By Lakshman Prasad, Konark Publishers Pvt.
Price: 300/-

Vandana Bedi and
Manavi Jalan

Today at the end of 20th century we can at least claim an increasing awareness about the issues related to disability and a world over shift in attitude towards disability - a shift from charity and sympathy to rights and opportunities; a shift from rehabilitation of persons with disability to their development along with their community and society at large.

This book by Sh. Lakshman Prasad focuses attention on the importance of vocational training and rehabilitation of persons with physical disability in India. It throws light on their selective placement, job identification and reservation, concessions and financial assistance, administrative and legislative measures and other related issues.

The author has been actively associated for the last forty years with many national and international organisations working with persons with physical disability. His book is one of the very few books presenting a factual picture of the role of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRCs) for persons with disability. The appendices contain extensive information regarding special employment exchanges, VRCs, lists of jobs identified for persons with physical disability existing in 'C' and 'D' categories and now also for 'A' and 'B' categories and International labour standards on Vocational rehabilitation of the disabled.

THE EYE a written word movement

Despite the fact that the book was written as recently as 1994, the book uses outdated terminology. The most striking one is use of the word 'handicapped' while all over the world the term being used is 'persons with disability'. Strangely enough the book does not reflect any recognition of the concept of community based rehabilitation (CBR). The author seems to only recommend specialised institutional approach which is increasingly being viewed as less practical and non-cost effective.

The foreword by Ranganath Mishra is full of 'sympathy and welfarism' towards the disabled in contrast to contemporary efforts by persons with disability to establish disability as a development issue and convert the attitude of welfarism to equal rights.

What's also striking is that the author places the entire onus of fitting or not fitting into a listed job, on the person with disability. He does not mention or suggest anything about building a congenial environment to enable persons with disability to avail of training opportunities and fulfil the job requirements. It is boldly pointed out that there are 852 government ITIs and 1035 private ones with 3 % reservation for disabled, most of which goes unutilized, without making an attempt to understand the causes for the same.

Though there is just a brief reference to the need for adaptations in public buildings, it is a very critical need to provide the necessary access to persons with disability.

The chapter on legislation gives very comprehensive information about the legislation in developed countries for persons with disability. Legislation in India, in the form of an Act on Persons with Disability was formulated and passed only in 1995, hence it does not figure in the chapter. The 'conclusions and suggestions' chapter has certain useful suggestions. People looking for information regarding government policies and facilities for employment of persons with disability would find this book useful.

Both Vandana Bedi and Manavi Jalan have been working with Spastics Society of Northern India for more than ten years.

THE DIVINE AND DEMONIAC

MAHISA'S HEROIC STRUGGLE WITH DURGA.

Carmel Berkson, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1996.

Price Rs. 475/-

Subhashini Aryan

Of late, some American scholars have been devoting themselves to an analytic study of Hindu myths and legends, among them notable being Carmel Berkson and Wendy O'Flaherty. The knowledge Sanskrit stands them in good stead in their task of interpreting original texts. This book then is not merely an analysis of the Durga legend - her conquest over Mahisha, the buffalo-demon, but an interdisciplinary study. Since Indian art is basically religious, religion forms an essential backdrop to the history of Indian art. As also other disciplines, such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology and comparative insights underline the study of similar myths in other civilisations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Europe.

The contents of this book resolve themselves into ten

long and exhaustive chapters, including the introductory and the concluding ones. Appended at the end are five sections focusing attention on the underlying theme 'congruent motifs in myth'. All the chapters, whether the first entitled *Family and Society in Contemporary India*, or right through the entire text, reflect an outsider's viewpoint, that is, a foreigner viewing Indian society, family life and its diverse cultural aspects from outside. I won't say Berkson's understanding is prejudiced, but it is certainly not skin-deep. Her interpretation though, is typically alien; she regards, rather projects, Mahisha as a hero, a young son asserting independence before a domineering mother. At the same time, the demon is presented as the Great Mother's lover and husband which he never became. The *Durga Saptashati* clearly narrates that this mighty warrior got enamoured of the Great Goddess's indescribable divine beauty, and expressed his desire to marry her. His proposal brought about his downfall and final death after a long and fierce battle, which proved the Mother Goddess was mightier than the demon.

To assert that in the Kushan images Durga puts her arm around Mahisha in an embrace is absolutely incorrect. A major flaw in American scholarship is that they tend to view everything in the light of incest, love and sex and the (misguiding) Freudian psychology revolving around the Oedipus complex. The myth of Durga's conquest of Mahisha is devoid of sexual overtones. Berkson's book is a glorification of Mahisha, whereas our actual story is a glorification of the Mother Goddess, the Female Principle, occupying the pivotal position in the matrilineal society of the Agama followers. The same myth is traceable in the ancient civilisations of West Asia, Egypt, Greece and the rest of Europe under different names. It is not known to the world at large, (especially the conceited western academia), that the Hindus migrated to West Asia through Iran, where they established their own colonies and kingdoms and ruled for several centuries. They were in close contact with Egypt and the rest of the Mediterranean countries, and this interaction led to the introduction of their culture and religion in Egypt, Greece and Europe.

I think, the ninth chapter dealing with the artistic depiction of the Durga- *Mahishamardini* theme in Indian sculptures is the most interesting. Berkson's penetrating insight into the artistic development of sculpture is matchless, as it was in her earlier books such as *Elephanta*. But her interpretation of the present phase of Indian society, plagued by the 'male syndrome', is incorrect. Two images of Nandi the sacred bull of Shiva have been wrongly mentioned as representing Mhasobha in Maharashtra. There is a need to interpret each aspect of Indian culture from the Indian viewpoint, not as it appears to alien eyes.

BOOK REVIEWS

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO HOYSALA TEMPLES

Gerard Foekema.

Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. 1996.

Price Rs.450/-

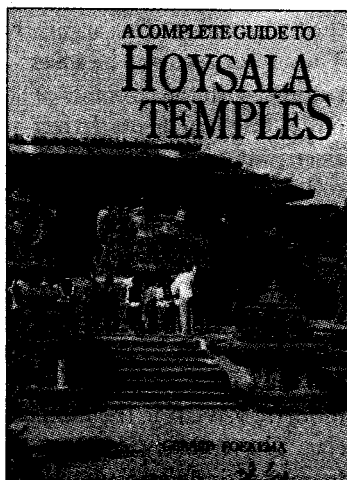
Subhashini Aryan

South India is a rich treasure house for any lover of Indian art, architecture and culture. Numerous foreign scholars are engaged in research on diverse aspects of South Indian temple architecture, prominent among them being, George Michell. Foekema, a Dutch art historian, has already studied Hoysala temple architecture exhaustively. The present book is a shorter version to serve as a tourist guide, his aim being to make known to the discerning traveller, all the big and small temples constructed by the Hoysala dynasty. The purpose is good, as all the temples included in the study are not listed by ASI or tourism guide books. Written in a simple manner, the book is informative about the history and background of temple builders, inscriptions left by them, plans, architectural features and sculptural embellishments.

Two sections comprising general information about the Hoysala dynasty and its historical background prepares the reader for a view of how these architectural marvels were ordered by the kings to immortalise their names. Both the sections are written in such a manner so as not to keep the tourist guessing about things. It includes short, but densely-packed notes on fifteen temples.

So far, only four major temples are known to art historians and the lay visitor - those of Belur, Halebid, Somnathpur and Shravanabelagola. To this short list, Foekema has added eleven more shrines, hitherto unknown or less known, for the benefit of the tourists. Each temple is dealt with properly, in all its details - sculptural and decorative arrangements, plans, architectural features, and all the paraphernalia that goes into the *raison d'être* of a Hindu temple.

Foekema has successfully achieved his aim of taking these temples out of the narrow realm of the specialists, i.e. archaeologists and art historians, and making them known to the ordinary visitors, both Indian and foreign. Plainly speaking, his sole intention is to reach out to a wider readership. The sharp, high density black and white illustrations of the temples show the morphology of each Hoysala shrine. These temples datable to 12th and 13th A.D. are marked by sculptural reliefs which are highly ornate, rather over ornate; for this reason, some western scholars have used the term *rococo* for them. This term, according to the history of western art, means the period when artists work rather mechanically, their creations appear to be devoid of inspiration, aesthetic vision and the sublime that makes a work of art 'classical'. It is true that the sculptural reliefs decorating the Hoysala shrines convey the impression of being profusely ornate, but the spark of genius does not seem to have evaporated into thin air. It is very much there, if one has eyes to see.



Since Foekema is a professional art historian, it would have been better to highlight the architectural features and decorative devices these temples share with other South Indian temples as well as with those of North India. This would have added a new dimension to this book.

The publishers deserve a word of praise for competent printing of the book. It is a well produced book, with good layouts and excellent illustrations. This book should be a welcome addition to the study of South Indian temple architecture.

Dr. Subhashini Aryan is a noted art historian and author. She is an authority on Himalayan art and architecture.

MESSAGE FOR HEALTH AND HEALING

S.V. Govindan.

Abhinav Publications,
New Delhi. 1996.

Price: Rs. 450/-

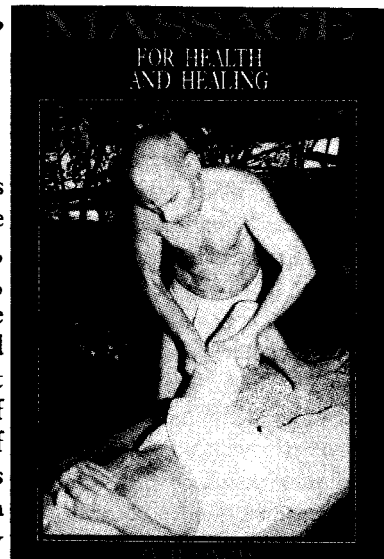
Anuradha A.Joneja

Massage has always played a vital role in an Indian's life, and somehow or the other, it has continued in practice both at family and professional levels. It formed an integral part of the Indian system of medicine since times immemorial, and Ayurveda prescribes a baffling variety of massages for diverse

ailments, physical and psychosomatic. Consequent upon the two-centuries old British rule in India, our thousands of years old culture and its values suffered a devastating setback, a rude jolt, and the western medicinal system of allopathy was so popularised that Indians lost faith in Ayurvedic medicine, in *vaidyas*. In spite of all these discouraging factors, ayurvedic medicine is still prescribed by its practitioners found in all corners of our vast sub-continent, and Indians' general disenchantment with allopathy is slowly helping the ayurvedic medicinal system to emerge out of its obscurity and take a prominent place. Increasingly, not only Indians, but westerners are beginning to realise that permanent cure lies in Yoga and Ayurveda and meditation. *Sahaja-yoga* and *hatha-yoga* are very popular in the West. Massage with medicated oils is an integral part of Ayurveda, and it is known that our *rishis* practised *kayakalpa*. Kerala households, even today, have preserved the tradition of medicated oil massages not only for rejuvenation, but for all maladies.

The massage techniques mentioned in the book under review, such as kneading, stroking, slapping, pressing, are, by and large, known to even illiterate women and wrestlers. The women restore patients to health in their post-natal treatment, and the wrestlers are well known bone-setters. But there is much more to massage than just what I have mentioned so far.

Thanks to a handful of medical practitioners in the West, as well as a few enterprising doctors from Kerala in our own



country, traditional Indian techniques of massage and its extremely beneficial healing effects have fast come into the limelight. The publication of the book under review is very appropriate from this viewpoint, since it contains all the information one needs about massage. The treatment of the subject is really exhaustive, discussed in four chapters.

The first chapter informs the reader about the history of massage, human physiology and the science of *marma* (vital areas). It is well known that when our *rishis* were engaged in unravelling the mysteries of the universe, they needed to stay healthy and live long, so as to carry on their work. This led them to discover herbs that could be used to retain youthfulness and health and longevity. Ayurveda that was born as a consequence was a marvellous gift of these *rishis* to us. This topic is expanded comprehensively in Chapter Two to inform the reader about an amazing variety of massages. Healing through massage, the theme of the next chapter, throws light on Ayurvedic herbs and dietary charts, for the sound basis of good health is good food. Besides this, Govindan gives us significant information as to how to heal oneself through massage and these techniques are accompanied by illustrations. Spirituality forms the essential woof and the warp of the fabric of Hinduism; without the knowledge of the *chakras* in the subtle body, it is difficult to activate spiritual energy, massage being a means to that end. In the appendices, Govindan discusses acupressure, reflexology, *yoga nidra* and *kayakalpa*, besides listing Ayurvedic medicine centres.

This book has immense use, living as we do in an age of stress and strain which gives rise to countless diseases. With the help of illustrations and detailed descriptions of massage techniques, one can practise massage on oneself and others. The publication of this book is very timely.

Anuradha A. Joneja is a historian and educationist.

THE ARYAS : FACTS WITHOUT FANCY AND FICTION

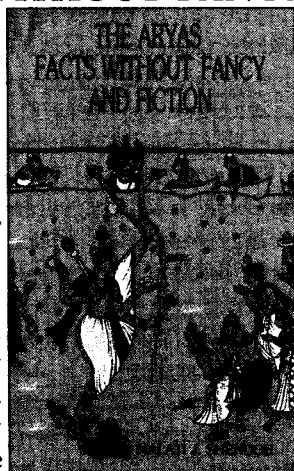
Malati J. Shendge.

Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. 1996.

Price: Rs. 180/-

Anuradha A. Joneja

In the course of the past two decades, there has been a spurt in the publications of books on the Aryans. It is not untrue to say that the theory of an Aryan invasion of India was systematically propagated with a view to divide India into the 'Aryan foreign conquerors and Dravidian indigenous populations', so as to make Indians feel we are a nation of barbarians and slaves who were civilised by foreigners from time to time. Swami Dayananda and Sri Aurobindo took up cudgels against this false propaganda by vehemently denouncing it in their works. Numerous nationalist scholars and historians have asserted the same view. Now the scale has tilted heavily in favour of the view that the Aryans were the indigenous inhabitants of India.



Malati Shendge who claims to have carefully researched this topic without bias, has named her slim book, *Aryas Facts Without Fancy and Fiction*. Sounds very impressive, indeed. In the densely packed fourteen chapters, she argues that the original homeland of the Aryans is in Iran from where they migrated to the Indus valley. This argument does not sound all that weighty. The author seems to be a Sanskritist, has read the *Rigveda*, and is familiar with the contents of the *Avesta*. Even then she has made misleading statements. In fact, the entire book is full of misleading assertions such as the arrival of the Sumerians to the Indus valley, who destroyed the Harappan culture flourishing there (p. 64). This is just one example, there being several more. If Shendge does not accept that the Aryan clans moved out of India riding in their spoked-wheel horse-driven chariots and established kingdoms all over West Asia and even beyond, she is free not to. The Asuras, Pishachas, Rakshasas, Gandhrvas, etc., are names of tribes and by no means connote demons. This connotation is modern. Ravana in the *Ramayana* was a member of the Rakshasa clan. The tendency in this book is to cite quotations and opinions from western historians and archaeologists, such as the Allchins, without sifting through the western bias of cultural superiority.

It is true that Malati Shendge has taken much pains to write this book, but her conclusions are not acceptable nor convincing. To say that Akkadian and Sumerian words abound in Sanskrit and not vice versa is a mistake on her part. Nor is it understandable why the Aryans invaded only the Indus Valley and not any other part in north-western India. She may have examined the archaeological specimens discovered in diverse Harappan sites; still her conclusions are misleading and misguided. Much of what S.R. Rao, the archeologist writes in his several books is correct; he has even tried to show how the Brahmi script evolved from the Mohenjodaro pictographs; he has taken into account the Hittites, Kassites, and other kingdoms established by the Aryans in West Asia.

This book makes confusing reading and does not enlighten readers. A discerning reader is compelled to think but it is difficult to accept the views expressed by Malati Shendge.

UNIVERSALISATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Malgavkar PD

Konark Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi. (1995)

Avik Ghosh

The decade of the nineties began with the Jomtien declaration of Education for All by 2000 AD. This gave a sense of urgency to the unfinished task of Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) and Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). The inability to accomplish the goal of providing free education to all children between the age of six to fourteen years as had been guaranteed in the Indian Constitution, has been a matter of considerable discomfort and embarrassment to our planners and decision makers.

International pressure has been mounting on the Government of India to ensure that highest priority is accorded to UPE/UEE and, for the first time since Independence, external

aid from the **World Bank** and other bilateral donors started flowing into this social sector. At the same time, India has been singled out as the **largest contributor** to the world's illiterates and it has been argued that **not adopting effective legislation** to make primary **education compulsory**, on the ground that children from poor families **contribute to family earnings**, is only avoiding the issue of **providing schools in adequate number** and ensuring basic education **that is relevant to the local milieu**.

In this **overall context**, a study conducted by P.D. Malgavkar under the auspices of Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi is **expected to provide new insight** into the several issues of **high dropout rate (only 54 % of children enrolled in Class I complete class V)**, teacher absenteeism, access to socially disadvantaged **groups (girls and SC/ST)** and pedagogic aspects of curriculum **and teaching methodology**. The published volume which is the **result of the study** belies such expectation and **disappoints the reader**. The author has perhaps been handicapped by **limited access to latest information**. For a study completed in 1994, it is **strange that the Eighth Plan (1992-97)** is hardly mentioned. **Multi-class analysis** pertains to 1981 Census. Events like the 1993 **EFA Summit Meeting of Nine Most Populous Countries in New Delhi**, that sharpened the focus on quality, **gender - based discrimination** and access, go unnoticed. Government of India's **'branchhead' strategy of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)** for overhauling the primary education system in this country is not mentioned.

It is sad that Malgavkar's suggestion that by 'knitting together policy, database management expertise and organisational structure' and 'generating public enthusiasm and community mobilisation' the goal of UPE be achieved is only a **pious generalisation that is oft repeated**. Policy recommendations have to be **more focused and based on in-depth analysis and latest information**.

Compulsory Primary Education is one of the items in the Common **Minimum Programme (CMP)** of the UF government. A **national mid day meal** was launched in 1995 as a populist measure but it is being continued in the Ninth Plan. Much experience has been gained from the several innovative projects and **approaches that have been tried**. The effort is to **consolidate the experience and push forward**. Mr. Malgavkar writes with the **perspective of a goal to be achieved at a distance**, basing himself on **information already a few years old**. By the time of publication of the book in 1995 events have rendered his recommendations **irrelevant**.

In passing, it must be mentioned that the editing is shoddy with paragraphs from one chapter repeated in another, texts obviously **lifted from other publications** without acknowledgement and much else. Centre for Policy Research should not **rest on its reputation** as a 'think tank' for national policy formulation but should remain alert to the changing times and ensure that a **publication meets the minimum quality standard expected from CPR**.

Avik Ghosh works as a Senior Fellow at the National Institute of Adult Education, New Delhi.

VEDIC COSMOLOGY: CREATION IDEAS IN THE ANCIENT VEDIC RELIGION

(A HERMENEUTIC STUDY)

Rajendra Verma

New Age International Publishers, New Delhi, 1996

Price: Rs.600/-

Prabhakar V. Begde

The creation of the universe and the evolution of man have fascinated mankind for ages. The oldest thoughts on these subjects are to be found in the *Vedas*. During the last century and a half, many scholars, Indian and European, have critically examined the cosmogony and cosmology of the *Vedas*. *The Story of Creation* (an English translation of the Hindi original) is an important study which focuses on the material formation of the earth, the sun etc. Verma highlights the embedded philosophical and symbolical meaning of the hymns of creation found in the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.

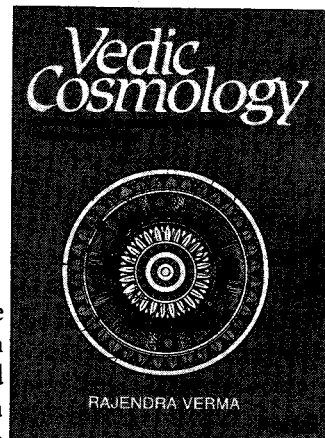
The study of the *Vedas* from a cosmological angle is the study of the order of creation and its underlying philosophy. The cosmology of *Vedic samhitas* is not based on the interplay of different cosmic phases of the Being in relation to their temporal situation. Rather, creation is injected into a primordial, anarchic condition which prevails when one *kalpa* of creation ends, leading to chaos in the intervening period, by enforcing on it 'order' through *Rta*.

India's most pervasive creation myth deals with space that is the first and foremost phenomenon of creation. Indian cosmogony as primeval architecture has the creation of space as its theme.

Cosmogony tells us of the creation of the world and of the state prior to creation. One homogenous substance of fluid density was assumed to exist and this enveloped everything which was formless and indescribable. In the continuous flood, billows after billows collide and a golden egg, the mystic *Hiranyagarbha* is said to have come into existence. Lord Indra divided it by propping up its upper half. It became the firmament while its lower half, the earth, floated on the water. Lord Indra himself was part of his cosmic architecture.

In this *Rigvedic* myth, God is the architect and the supporter of the cosmos. It is filled with the space, *antariksha*, which lies between heaven and earth.

The book deals with eighteen *suktas* or hymns from the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. The *sukta*, *Asya Vamasya* (The Riddle of the Universe) has been handled at great length. Existence is 'Sat' according to *vedic* terminology. The *Asya Vamasya* and *Nasadiya Sukta* of the *Rigveda* are vitally concerned with existence. In the *Vedas*, 'existence' has been interpreted as a manifestation of *Tat Ekam* - the indefinable 'absolute'. A study of the hymns of 'creation' shows that man is not created out of any material, in fact God as *Brahman*, does not create. It is only his potential manifestations as *Hiranyagarbha* and *Viswakarma* that create. The *Purusa sukta* of the *Rigveda* describes material



creation as a product of evolution.

Purusa sukta is a vividly graphic and deeply integrated part of the Vedic Cosmology embracing the metaphysical, the social and the theological thought in the *Vedas*. An interesting *sukta* of *Rigveda* X-90, repeated in the *Atharvaveda* XIX-6, describes a cosmic sacrifice in which the primieval seed-man - the *Purusa*, is engaged in performing a *yagna* in which the *Purusa* himself is the sacrificial object.

Cosmology is inherent in the hymn X-7 of *Atharvaveda* which deals with the underlying theosophy integrating the *Sat* (existent) and the *Asat* (non-existence). *Rta*, the principle of cosmic harmony is also the spiritual fervour which resides in the *Skambha*. The Cosmic Pillar - the *Axis-mundi*, is the fundamental support of all. It not only supports the heaven on the earth but also acts as the inter-penetrating support of the three *Lokas* - the earth, the heaven and the nether world.

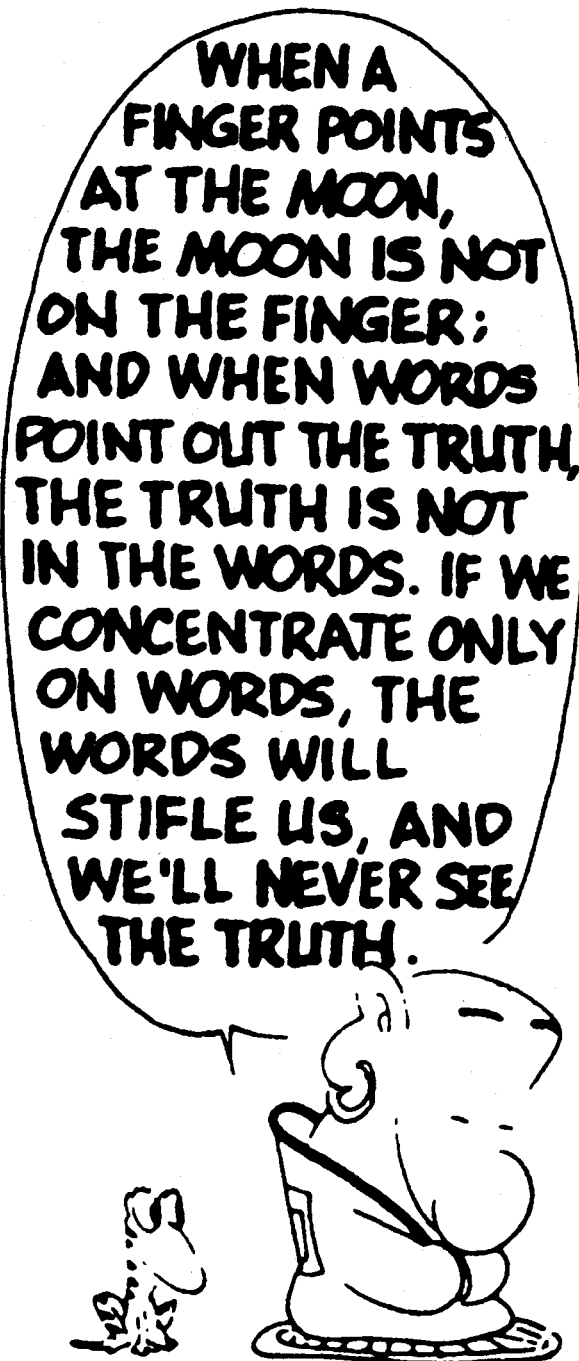
The book also incorporates thirteen plates figuring divinities like *Vishnu*, *Surya*, *Trivikrama*, *Agni*, *Indra*, *Varuna*, *Saraswati* etc. to indicate the iconigraphic transformations that Vedic deities have undergone in the post-Vedic period. The book seeks to satisfy the quest of the curious student as well as the lay reader who wants to know about Vedic concepts such as *Hiranyagarbha*, *Purusa*, *Virat*, *Skambha*, *Brahman* etc. The book is a scholarly work by an author who has written extensively on Indian philosophy and culture. He has attempted a transcreation of the hymns to facilitate an easy understanding, without deviating from the original philosophical contents. The language is simple and avoids the complex terminology usually associated with such a subject.

One drawback of the book is poor copy-editing. Many of the Sanskrit hymns that are rendered in Roman script are full of errors e.g. hymn-16 of the *Purusa sukta*. In spite of such errors this book is a valuable contribution.

WE HAVE RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING TITLES FOR REVIEW:

1. Poonam Smith-Sreen : *Accountability in Development Organisations: Experiences of Women's Organisations in India* (Sage Publications, New Delhi)
2. Shobita Punja : *Daughters of the Ocean: Discovering the Goddess Within* (Viking Penguin India, New Delhi)
3. Indra Jaising (editor) *Justice for Women: Personal Laws, Women's Rights and Law Reform* (The Other India Press, Mapusa, Goa)
4. Aslghar Ali Engineer : *The Rights of Women in Islam* (Sterling Publishers, New Delhi)
5. Ravi Gulhati, Kaval Gulhati, Ajay Mehra and Janaki Rajan: *Strengthening Voluntary Action in India: Health-Family Planning, the Environment and Women's Development* (Konark Publishers, New Delhi)
6. Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman: *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagement with Law in India* (Sage Publications, New Delhi)
7. Patricia Uberoi (editor) : *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State* (Sage Publications, New Delhi).

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